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THE

UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY.

BY

W. D. HOWELLS,

AUTHOR OF "THE LADY OF THE AROOSTOOK," "A FOREGONE CONCLUSION," "A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE," "VENETIAN LIFE," ETC.

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THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY.

I.

SOME years ago, at a time when the rapid growth of the city was changing the character of many localities, two young men were sitting, one afternoon early in April, in the parlor of a house on one of those streets which, without having yet accomplished their destiny as business thoroughfares, were no longer the homes of the decorous ease that once inhabited them. The young men held their hats and canes in their hands, and they had that air of having just been admitted and of waiting to be received by the people of the house which rests gracefully only on persons of the other sex. One was tall and spare, and he sat stiffly expectant; the other, who was much shorter and stouter, with the mature bloom which comes of good living and a cherished digestion, was more restless. As he rose from his chair, after a few moments, and went to examine some detail of the dim room, he moved with a quick, eager step, and with a stoop which suggested a connoisseur's habit

of bending over and peering at things. He returned to his seat, and glanced round the parlor, as if to seize the whole effect more accurately.

"So this is the home of the Pythoness, is it?" he said.

"If you like to call her a Pythoness," answered the other.

"Oh, I don't know that I prefer it: I'm quite willing to call her a test-medium. I thought perhaps Pythoness would respectfully idealize the business. What a queer, melancholy house, what a queer, melancholy street! I don't think I was ever in a street before where quite so many professional ladies, with English surnames, preferred Madam to Mrs. on their door-plates. And the poor old place has such a desperately conscious air of going to the deuce. Every house seems to wince as you go by, and button itself up to the chin for fear you should find out it had no shirt on, — so to speak. I don't know what 's the reason, but these material tokens of a social decay afflict me terribly: a tipsy woman is n't dreadfuller than a haggard old house, that 's once been a home, in a street like this."

"The street 's going the usual way," said the other. "It will be all business in a few years."

"But in the mean time it causes me inexpressible anguish, and it will keep doing it. If I know where there 's a thorn, I can't help going up and pressing my waistcoat against it. I foresee that I shall keep coming. This parlor alone is poignant enough to afford me the most rapturous pain; it

pierces my soul. This tawdry red velvet wall-paper; the faded green reps of that sofa; those family photographs in their oval papier-maché frames; that round table there in the corner, with its subscription literature and its tin-type albums; and this frantic tapestry carpet! I know now why the ghost-seers affect this sort of street and this sort of parlor: the spirits can't resist the deadly fascination! *No* ghost, with any strength of character, could keep away. I suppose that this apartment is swarming, now, with disembodied ladies and gentlemen of the first distinction. Well, I like your going into this. I respect everybody's superstition — except my own; I can't respect that, you know."

"Do you think I believe in these people's rubbish?"

"I did n't know. A man must believe in something. I could n't think of anything else you believed in. I 'm not sure I don't believe in it a trifle, myself: my nerves do. May I ask why you come here, if you refuse the particular rubbish afforded by the establishment? You 're not a curious man."

"Why did you come?"

"You asked me. Besides, I have no occasion for a reason. I am an emotional, not a rational being, as I 've often told you."

The taller man laughed dryly. "Very well, then, you don't need a reason from me. You can wait and see why I came."

The short man gave a shrug. "I hope I shan't have to wait long. An emotional being has a right to be unreasonably impatient."

A light sound of hesitating steps made itself heard in the next room; the two men remained silent, and presently one of the partition doors was rolled back, and a tall young girl in a somewhat theatrical robe of white serge, with a pale green scarf on her shoulders, appeared at the threshold. Her beautiful, serious face had a pallid quiet, broken by what seemed the unnatural alertness of her blue eyes, which glanced quickly, like those of a child too early obliged to suspect and avert; her blonde hair, which had a plastic massiveness, was drawn smoothly back from her temples, and lay heaped in a heavy coil on her neck, where its rich abundance showed when she turned her profile away, as if to make sure that some one was following in the room behind her. A door opened and closed there, and she came on towards the two men, who had risen. At sight of the taller of the two, she halted, while an elderly gentleman hurried forward, with a bustling graciousness, and offered him his small, short hand. He had the same fair complexion as the girl, but his face was bright and eager; his thin, light hair was wavy and lustreless; he looked hardly so tall as she. He had a mouth of delicacy and refinement, and a smile of infantine sweetness.

"Ah, you 've really come," he said, shaking the young man's hand cordially. "So many people manifest an interest in our public séances, and then let the matter drop without going any further. I don't know whether I presented you to my daughter, the other day, Mr. Ford?"

Ford bowed gravely to the girl, who slightly returned his obeisance. "Let me introduce Mr. Phillips, Dr. Boynton, — a friend whom I ventured to bring with me."

"Very glad to see you, Mr. Phillips. I was about to say — Oh! my daughter, Mr. Phillips, Miss Egeria Boynton. Take seats, gentlemen — I was about to say that one of the most curious facts connected with the phenomena is the ardor with which people take the matter up on first acquaintance, and the entire indifference with which they let it drop. In our line of life, Mr. Phillips, as public exhibitors, we often have occasion to note this. It seldom happens but half a dozen persons come to me at the close of a séance, and ask earnestly for the privilege of pursuing their investigations with the aid of my daughter's mediumship. But these persons rarely call; I rarely see them at a second public séance, even. If I had not such abiding hopes of the phenomena myself, I should sometimes feel discouraged by the apathy and worse than apathy with which they are received, not the first, but the second time. You must excuse my expression of surprise at first greeting you, Mr. Ford, — you must indeed. It was but too natural under the circumstances."

"By all means," answered Ford. "I never thought of not coming. But I can't promise that you 'll find me a ready believer."

"Precisely," returned the other. "That is the very mood in which I could have wished you to

come. I am myself, as I think I told you, merely an inquirer. In fact" — Dr. Boynton leaned forward, with his small, plump hands extended, as if the more conveniently to round his periods, but arrested himself, in the explanation he was about to make, at something Mr. Phillips was saying to his daughter.

"I could n't help being interested in the character of your parlor, before you came in, Miss Boynton. These old Boston houses all have so much character. It 's surprising what good taste people had fifty or sixty years ago, — the taste of the First Empire. That cornice is very pretty, — very simple and very refined, neither glutted nor starved in design; and that mantel, — how refreshing those sane and decent straight lines are after the squirms and wriggles of subsequent marble! I don't know that I should have chosen urns for an ornament to the corners; but we must not forget that we are mortal; and there *are* cinerary associations with fire-places."

Miss Boynton said nothing in return for this speech, the full sense of which had perhaps not quite reached her. She stared blankly at Phillips, to whom her father turned with his most winning smile. "An artist?" asked Dr. Boynton.

"A sufferer in the cause of art," returned Phillips with ironical pathos.

"Ah! A connoisseur," said the doctor.

"The fact is," said Phillips, "I was finding the modern equipment of your old-fashioned parlor in-

tolerable, as you came in. You won't mind my not liking your landlady's taste, Miss Boynton?" he demanded with suave ingratiation.

Miss Boynton looked about the room, as if she had not seen it before. "It *is* ugly," she answered quietly. "But it does as well as any."

"Yes," her father eagerly interposed, "better than any other room in any other house in any other quarter of the city. We are still, as I may say, gentlemen, feeling our way towards what we believe a sublime truth. My daughter's development is yet so recent, so incomplete, that we must not reject any furthering influences, however humble, however disagreeable. It is not by our own preference that we are here. I know, as well as you do, that this is a street inhabited by fortune-tellers and charlatans of low degree. For that very reason I have taken our lodgings here. The element, the atmosphere, of simple, unquestioning faith brought into this vicinity by the dupes of these people is, unknown to them, of the highest use, the most vital advantage, to us in our present attempt. At the same time, I should not, I could not in candor, deny to these pretenders themselves a beneficial, a highly — I may call it — evolutionary, influence upon my daughter. We desire no personal acquaintance with them. But they are of the old tradition of supernaturalism, — a tradition as old as nature, — and we cannot afford to reject the favor of the tradition which they represent. You will understand that, gentlemen. We cannot say, We hold — or we trust we hold —

communion with spirits, and yet deny that there is something in second-sight, divination, or whatever mysteries these people pretend to. In some sort, we must psychologically ally ourselves with them. They are, no doubt, for the most part and in most cases, shameless swindlers; but it seems to be a condition of our success that we shall not deny — I don't say that we shall believe — the fact of an occult power in some of them. Their neighborhood was very repulsive at first, and still is measurably so; but we accept it, and have found it of advantage. We are mere experimenters, as yet, and claim nothing except that my daughter is the medium, the instrument, of certain phenomena which *we* can explain only in one way; we do not dispute the different explanations of others. In the course of our investigations, we neglect no theory, however slight, that may assist us. Now, in so simple a matter as dress, even: we have found by repeated experiment that the manifestations have a greater affinity for white than any other color. This may point to some hidden truth — I don't say — in the old-fashioned ghost-stories, where the spectre always appears in white. At any rate, we think it worth while that my daughter should wear white, in both her public and her private séances, for the present. And green, — just now we seem to find a good effect in pale green, Mr. Phillips, pale green."

"If I may say it without impertinence to Miss Boynton's father, in my character of connoisseur,"

said Phillips, with a bow for the young girl, which he delivered to the doctor, "I think the effect is very good indeed."

"Ah! yes, yes!" cried the doctor. "In that sense. I see. Very good. However, I meant" — Dr. Boynton paused, bending on either visitor an exquisite smile of child-like triumph. A series of light taps, beginning with a sound like a straining of the wood, and then separating into a sharper staccato, was heard at different points in the room, chiefly on the table, and on the valves of the sliding doors. Phillips gave a little nervous start. Ford remained indifferent, but for the slow movement of his eyes in the direction of the young girl, who bent an appealing look on her father. The doctor lifted a hand to invoke attention; the raps died away. "Giorgione, I presume. Will you ask, Egeria?"

She hesitated. Then, in a somewhat tremulous voice, she demanded, "Is it you, Giorgione?" A light shower of raps instantly responded. A thrill of strong excitement visibly passed over the girl, who clutched one hand with the other, and seemed to stay herself by a strong effort of will in her place on the sofa.

"Calmly, my daughter, calmly!" said Dr. Boynton, making a certain restraining gesture towards her. "Yes, it is Giorgione. He can never keep away when color is mentioned. Very celebrated for his coloring, I am told, when alive. A Viennese painter, I believe, Mr. Phillips."

"Venetian," answered Phillips, abstractedly.

He recalled himself, and added with a forced lightness, "But I don't know that I can advise you to trust the professions of our rapping and tapping friend; there are so few genuine Giorgiones." A brisk volley of taps discharged upon the wall directly behind Phillips's head caused him to turn abruptly and stare hard at the place.

"Oh, you can't *see* it, Phillips," said Ford, with a spare laugh of derision.

"No," said Dr. Boynton, sweetly, "you can't see it. At least, not yet. But if our experiments progress as favorably as they have for the last six months, we may hope before a great while to render the invisible agencies of these sounds as sensible to sight as to hearing. Don't disturb yourself, Mr. Phillips. Mere playfulness, I assure you. They never inflict any real injury." While he spoke the raps renewed themselves here and there upon the woodwork, into the fibre of which they seemed at last to reënter, and died away in the sort of straining with which they began. "Egeria," said the doctor, turning impressively towards his daughter, "it seems to me the conditions are uncommonly propitious, this afternoon. I think we may look for something of a very remarkable character." He glanced at the clock on the mantel, and confronted his visitors with a smiling face of apology. "Gentlemen, I suppose you came for a séance. My interest in the matter has betrayed me into remarks that have taken up too much of your time."

"I came with the hope of seeing some further proofs of your skill," said Ford; "but if there is anything" —

"Oh, no, no, no! Not at all, not at all!" hastily interrupted the doctor, with a deprecatory wave of his hand. "But — ah — I hardly know how to put it. The fact is, I am anxious for investigation by gentlemen of your intelligence, and I should very much dislike to postpone you — Our landlady, who is a medium of note in her way, — she has lately come to Boston from the West, — had arranged this afternoon for a séance with a number of persons rather more grounded in the belief than yourselves, and" —

The young men rose. "We won't detain you," said Ford. "We can come another time."

"No, no! Wait!" Dr. Boynton waved them to their seats again, which they provisionally resumed, and turned to his daughter. "Egeria, I think I may venture to ask these gentlemen to join our friends?"

"There 's no reason why they should n't stay, if they like," said the girl, impassively.

"We should be delighted," exclaimed Phillips, "if you'll let us! I 'm so little used to ghosts," he said, glancing round at the walls and tables with an apprehensiveness which was perhaps not altogether affected, "that, for my part, I should rather like plenty of company, Miss Boynton, — if Messer Giorgione won't take it amiss."

"Ah, very good!" interposed her father. "Very

good, indeed. Ha! Why I hesitated was that the sort of experiment to be tried this afternoon requires conditions, concessions, that I thought you might not care to offer, gentlemen. I wish to be perfectly frank with you; what you will see might be produced by trickery, especially in a company of ten or a dozen persons, some of whom could be in collusion with the medium. I pass no judgment upon a certain order of phenomena in their present stage of development, but I make it a rule, myself, measurably to distrust all manifestations occurring in the presence of more than three persons besides the medium. Still, if you will do us the honor to remain, I can promise you something very curious and interesting, — something novel in the present phase of supernaturalism; nothing less than apparitions, gentlemen, or, as we call them, materializations. You have heard, perhaps, of these materializations?"

"Yes," said Ford indifferently, "I have heard of them."

"Mrs. Le Roy — our landlady — has made an eclectic study of the materializations of several other mediums, and she has succeeded, or claims to have succeeded, not only in reproducing them, but in calling about her many of the principal apparitions who visit the original séances. If you are not familiar with apparitions you may find it interesting."

"Really, Dr. Boynton," said Phillips, "do you mean that I shall *see* my friend Giorgione performing that sort of tattoo on your wall-paper?"

"Not exactly," urbanely responded Dr. Boynton. "No. It 's a curious feature of the manifestations that the audible spirits are never seen, and that those rendered visible by the new development of materialization are invariably mute. But in a dark séance to follow the materializations, my daughter" —

Egeria rose from her place on the sofa and moved toward her father, who, alarmed at some expression of her face, started to his feet to encounter her. She laid her arms with a beseeching gesture on his shoulder. "Father, father! Give it up for to-day, do! I can't go through with it. I am weak — sick; I have no strength left. Everything is gone."

"Why, Egeria! My poor girl! Excuse me, gentlemen: I will be with you in a moment." He cast a sustaining arm about her slim shape, and with the other hand pushed open one of the sliding doors, and disappeared with her from the room beyond.

The men remained in a silence which Ford had apparently no intention of breaking. "Upon the whole," said Phillips, at last, "this is rather painful. Miss Boynton is very much like some other young ladies — for a Pythoness. I should like to see the dark séance, — if I may express myself so inconsequently, — but really I hope the old gentleman will give it up, as she suggested."

"Don't flatter yourself," said Ford, gloomily. "The thing 's just beginning."

"Ford, I don't see how you have the heart to take your attitude towards these people," returned

the other. "It was shocking to stand on the defensive against the girl, as if she were an impostor. She 's a person you might help to escalloped oysters or ice-cream at an evening party, and not expect to talk half so magnificently as she looked. The man believes in himself, and it is your ironical attitude which annuls the honesty in him. That sort of thing kills any amount of genuineness in people."

"Very likely," assented Ford. "He 's coming back presently to say that our sphere — attitude, you call it; *his* quackery has a different nomenclature — has annulled his daughter's power over the spirits."

Phillips went up to examine the mantel-piece again. "Well, why not?"

"Certainly, why not? If you grant the one, there 's no trouble about granting the other."

"What do you make of what we heard?"

"Nothing."

"You heard it?"

"I hear clatter any time I wake in the night. But I don't attribute it to disembodied spirits on that account."

"Why not?"

"Because there are no disembodied spirits, for one thing."

"Ah, I 'm not so sure of that," said Phillips, with sprightly generosity.

"Really? You doubt everything."

"That 's very well, — but I suppose you mean anything. I prefer to keep an open mind. I don't

snub ghosts, for I think I may be one myself, some day."

As he spoke the door-bell rang, and in the interval between the ringing of the bell and the slow response of the servant, Dr. Boynton reëntered, rubbing his hands and smiling. "Sorry to have been obliged to leave you, gentlemen," he said. "You have witnessed, however, one of the most interesting phases of this mystery: mystery, I call it, for I'm as much in the dark about it as yourselves. My daughter felt so deeply the dissenting, the perhaps incredulous, mood — sphere — of one of you that she quite succumbed to it. Don't be alarmed! In an ordinary medium it would be an end of everything for the time being, but she will take part in the séance, all the same, to-day. I have been able to reinforce my daughter's powers by a gift — we will call it a gift — of my own. In former years I looked quite deeply into mesmerism, and I have never quite disused the practice of it, as a branch of my profession, — I am a physician. My wife, who has been dead my daughter's whole life," — an expression of pain, curious with reference to the eager brightness of the man's wonted aspect, passed over the speaker's face, — "was a very impressible subject of mine, and in her childhood Egeria was so. Since we have discovered what seems her power as a medium, I have found the mesmeric force — the application of exterior will — of the greatest use in sustaining her against the exhaustion she would otherwise incur from the many conflicting influences

she is subject to. I can't regret — I rejoice, in fact — that this phenomenon has occurred as it *has* occurred. It will enable me to present in her to-day the united action of those strange forces, equally occult, the mesmeric and the spiritistic. I have just left my daughter in a complete mesmeric trance, and you will see — you will see " —

He broke off abruptly, and went forward to meet a gentleman and lady, apparently two of the expected guests of Mrs. Le Roy. He greeted them with gay warmth as Mr. and Mrs. Merrifield, and was about to share their acquaintance with Ford and Phillips, when a tall man, with pale blue eyes and a thin growth of faded hair, of a like harshness on crown and chin, interrupted him with a solemnly proffered hand. " Why, Weatherby," said the doctor, shaking his hand, "I did n't hear you ring."

" I found the girl still at the door, and had no occasion to ring," said Mr. Weatherby.

" Right, right, — quite right ! " returned Dr. Boynton. " Glad to see you. Mr. Weatherby, Mr. Ford and Mr. Phillips, — inquirers. Mr. Weatherby is known among us, gentlemen, for powers which he is developing in the direction of levitation." Mr. Weatherby silently shook hands, regarding Phillips and Ford meantime with a remote keenness of glance, and then took a seat in a corner, with an air of established weariness, as if he had found levitation heavy work.

Dr. Boynton continued to receive his guests, and next introduced to the strangers a large, watery-

eyed man with a mottled face and reddish hair: "Mr. Eccles, — an inquirer like yourselves, gentlemen, but in a different spirit. Mr. Eccles has no doubt of the nature of the manifestations, but he is investigating the subject with a view — with a view" — Dr. Boynton looked for help to the gentleman whose position he was trying to state, and the latter came to his aid with a vigorous alacrity which was accented by the lavish display of an upper and lower set of artificial teeth.

"With a view to determine whether something cannot be done to protect us against the assumption by inferior spirits of the identity of the better class of essences. There are doubtless laws of the spirit-life, could we invoke them aright, which would hold these unruly masqueraders in check. I am endeavoring to study the police system — if I may use the expression — of the other world. For I am satisfied that until we have learned to appeal to the proper authorities against these pretenders, we shall get nothing of value from the manifestations. At present it seems to me that in most cases the phenomena are held in contempt by all respectable spirits. This deplorable state of things has resulted, I have no doubt, in great degree from the hostile manner in which investigation of the phenomena has been pursued in the material world."

"Yes," said Ford, "that 's an interesting point. My friend, here, was just speaking of some things of the sort before you came in. He mentioned the disadvantage to the medium of what he called the

ironical attitude; he contends that it makes them cheat."

"No doubt, no doubt," replied Mr. Eccles. "But its effect upon the approximating spiritual sphere is still worse. It drives from that sphere all candid and sober-minded spirits, and none but frivolous triflers remain. Are you a believer in the phenomena, Mr. — ah — Phillips?"

"I am scarcely even a witness of them yet," said Phillips. "But as a mere speculative observer, I don't see why one should n't come as worshipfully minded to a séance as to a church."

"Precisely, precisely, sir," assented Mr. Eccles. "And yet I cannot say that a séance is exactly a religious service. No, it partakes rather of a dual nature. It will doubtless be elevated in character, as the retro- and inter-acting influences improve. But at present it is a sort of informal reception at which friends from both worlds meet and commingle in social intercourse; in short, a kind of bi-mundane — bi-mundane" —

"Kettle-drum," suggested Ford.

"Ah!" breathed Mr. Eccles. He folded his arms, and set his artificial teeth to smile displeasure upon Ford's impassible face. Anything that he may have been going to say farther was cut short by the approach of a gentleman, at sight of whom his smile relaxed nothing of its displeasure.

"Hello! How do, Eccles?" said the new-comer, gayly. He was a short and slight man, and he planted himself in front of Mr. Eccles upon his

very small, squarely stepping feet. Whatever may have been the temperament of the invisible presences, those in the flesh were, with the exception of this gentleman, not at all lively: they were, in fact, of serious countenance and low spirits; and they were evidently glad of this co-religionist who could take their common belief so cheerfully. He had come in the last, and he had been passing a light word with this one and that, before saluting Mr. Eccles, who alone seemed not glad to see him. He was dressed in a smart business suit, whose fashionableness was as much at variance with the prevailing dress of the company as his gayety with its prevailing solemnity.

"How are you?" he said, looking up into Mr. Eccles's dental smile. "Going to get after those scamps again? Well, I'm glad of it. Behaved shamefully at Mrs. Merrifield's, the other night; knocked the chairs over and flung the flowers about, — ridiculous! If they can't manage better than that, a man might as well go to a democratic ward meeting when he dies. Ah, doctor!"

Dr. Boynton approached from the other room, which had been closed, and on which he again shut the rolling doors. "Mr. Hatch!" said the doctor radiantly, while he pressed the other's hand in both his own, and made a rose-bud of his mouth. "You just complete our list. Glad to see you."

"Thanks, much!" said Mr. Hatch. "Where 's Miss Egeria?"

"In a moment," replied the doctor mysteriously.

Then he turned to the company, and said in a formal tone, "As we are all here, now, friends, we won't delay any farther." He advanced and flung open the doors to the back parlor, discovering, in the middle of the room, a common extension dining-table, draped merely with so much of a striped turkey-red supper cloth as would fall over the edge and partly conceal the legs. The top of the table was pierced by a hole some ten or twelve inches square, and over this hole was set a box, open on one side, and lined with black velvet; a single gas jet burned at a half light overhead.

"Now, if you will take seats, ladies and gentlemen!" said Dr. Boynton. "Mrs. Merrifield, will you sit on my right, so as to be next my daughter? And Mr. Phillips on my left, here? And you, Mr. Ford, on Miss Smiley's left, next to Mr. Eccles? Mr. Hatch, take your place between those two ladies" —

"I 'm there, doctor, every time," said Mr. Hatch, promptly obeying.

"I must protest at the outset, Dr. Boynton," began Mr. Eccles, "against this sort of" —

"Beg pardon. You 're right, Eccles," said Hatch, "I won't do it any more. But when I get down at a table like this, I feel gay, and I can't help running over a little. But no spilling 's the word, now. Do we join hands, doctor, *comme à l'ordinaire?*"

"Yes, all join hands, please," answered the doctor.

"Well, I want these ladies to promise not to

squeeze my hands, either of them," said Hatch. The ladies laughed, and Mr. Eccles, relinquishing the hands of the persons next him, made a movement to rise, in which he was met by an imploring downward wave of Dr. Boynton's hand.

"Please, Mr. Eccles, remain. Mr. Hatch, I may trust your kindness? Miss Merrill, will you sing — ah — something?"

A small, cheerful lady, on the sunny side of thirty, with a pair of spectacles gleaming on her amiable nose, responded to this last appeal. "I think we had better all sing, doctor."

"I have a theory in wishing you to sing alone," said the doctor.

"Oh, very well!" Miss Merrill acquiesced. "Have you any preference?"

"No. Anything devotional."

"Maiden's Prayer, Miss Merrill," suggested Hatch.

This overcast Mr. Eccles again, but Miss Merrill took the fun in good part, and laughed.

"I don't believe you know anything about devotional music, Mr. Hatch," she said.

"That 's so. My répertoire is out already," owned Hatch.

Miss Merrill raised her spectacles thoughtfully to the ceiling, and after a moment began to sing Flee as a Bird to your Mountain, in a sweet contralto. As the thrilling tones filled the room all other sounds were quelled; the circle at the table became motionlessly silent, and the long sighing breath of

the listeners alone made itself heard in the pauses of the singing. Before the words died away, a draught of cold air struck across the room, and through the door at the head of the table, which unclosed mysteriously, as if blown open by the wind, a figure in white was seen in the passage without. It drifted nearer, and with a pale green scarf over her shoulders Egeria softly and waveringly entered the room. Her face was white, and her eyes had the still, sightless look of those who walk in their sleep. She advanced, and sank into the chair between her father and Mrs. Merrifield, and at the same moment that groaning and straining sound was heard, as if in the fibres of the wood; and then the sounds grew sharper and more distinct, and a continuous rapping seemed to cover the whole surface of the table, with a noise like that of heavy clots of snow driving against a window pane.

As Egeria took the chair left vacant for her, it could be seen that another had also found a place in the circle. This was a very large, dark woman of some fifty years, who silently saluted some of the company, half withdrawing from their sight as she sat down next to Mrs. Merrifield, behind the box.

Egeria remained staring blankly before her for a moment. Then she said in a weary voice, "They are here."

"Who are, my daughter?" demanded her father.

In a long sigh, "Legion," she responded.

"We may thank Mr. Hatch for the company we

are in," Mr. Eccles broke out resentfully. "I have protested" —

"Patience, — a little patience, Mr. Eccles!" implored Dr. Boynton. Then, without changing his polite tone, "Look again, Egeria," he said. "Are they all evil?"

"Their name is legion," wearily answered the girl, as before.

"Yes, yes, Egeria. They always come at first. But is there no hope of help against them? Look again, — look carefully."

"The innumerable host" —

"I knew it, — I knew it!" exulted the doctor.

"Disperses them," said the girl, and lapsed into a silence which she did not break again.

At a sign from the large woman, who proved to be Mrs. Le Roy, Dr. Boynton said, "Will you sing again, Miss Merrill?"

Miss Merrill repeated the closing stanza of the hymn she had already sung.

While she sang, flitting gleams of white began to relieve themselves against the black interior of the box. They seemed to gather shape and substance; as the singing ceased, the little hand of a child moved slowly back and forth in the gloom.

A moan broke from one of the women. "Oh, I hope it 's for me!" she quavered.

They began, one after another, to ask, "Is it for me?" the hand continuing to wave softly to and fro. When it came the turn of this woman, the hand was violently agitated; she burst into tears. "It 's my Lily, my darling little Lily."

The apparition beckoned to the speaker.

"You can touch it," said the doctor.

The woman bent over the table, and thrust her hand into the box; the apparition melted away; a single fragrant tuberose was flung upon the table. "Oh, oh!" sobbed the woman. "My Lily's favorite flower! She always liked snow-drops above everything, because they came the first thing in the spring. Oh, to think she can come to me, — to *know* that she is living yet, and can never die! I 'm sure I felt her little hand an instant, — so smooth and soft, so cold!"

"They always seem to be cold," philosophized Boynton. "A more exquisite vitality coming in contact with our own would naturally give the sensation of cold. But you must sit down, now, Mrs. Blodgett," added the doctor, kindly. "Look! There is another hand."

A large wrinkled hand, like that of an elderly woman, crept tremulously through the opening of the box, sank, and then creeping upward again laid its fingers out over the edge of the opening. No one recognized it, and it would have won no general acclaim if Mrs. Merrifield had not called attention to the lace which encircled the wrist; she caught a bit of this between her thumb and finger, and detained it a moment while the other ladies bent over and examined it. There was but one voice; it was real lace.

One hand after another now appeared in the box, some of them finding a difficulty in making their

way up through the aperture, which had been formed by cutting across in the figure of an X the black cloth which had lined the bottom of the box, and which now hung down in triangular flaps. The slow and feeble effort of the apparitions to free themselves from these dangling pieces of cloth heightened their effectiveness. From time to time a hand violently responded to the demand from one of the circle, "Is it for me?" and several persons were allowed to place their hands in the box and touch the materializations. These persons testified that they felt a distinct pressure from the spectral hands.

"Would you like to try, Mr. Phillips?" politely asked the doctor.

"Thanks, yes," said Phillips, after a hesitation. He put his hand into the box: the apparitional hand, apparently that of a young girl, dealt him a flying touch, and vanished. Phillips nervously withdrew his hand.

"Did you feel it?" inquired Dr. Boynton.

"Yes," answered Phillips.

"Oh, what was it like? Was n't it smooth and soft and cold?" demanded the mother of the first apparition.

"Yes," said Phillips; "it was a sensation like the touch of a kid glove."

"Oh, of course, of course!" Mr. Eccles burst out, in a sort of scornful groan. "A stuffed glove! If we are to approach the investigation in this spirit" —

"I beg your pardon?" said Phillips, inquiringly.

"I 'm sure," interposed Dr. Boynton, "that Mr. Phillips, whom I have had the honor of introducing to this circle, has intended nothing but a *bona fide* description of the sensation he experienced."

"I don't understand," said Phillips.

"You were not aware, then," pursued the doctor, "that there have been attempts to impugn the character of these and similar materializations, — in fact, to prove that these hands are merely stuffed gloves, mechanically operated?"

"Not at all!" cried Phillips.

"I was certain of your good feeling, your delicacy," said the doctor. "We will go on, friends."

But the apparitions had apparently ceased, while the raps, which had been keeping up a sort of desultory, telegraphic tattoo throughout, when not actively in use as a means of conversation with the disembodied presences, suddenly seemed to cover the whole surface of the table with their detonation.

"The materializations are over," said Mrs. Le Roy, speaking for the first time. Her voice, small and thin, oddly contrasted with her physical bulk.

"Oh, pshaw, Mrs. Le Roy!" protested Hatch, "don't give it up, that way. Come! I want Jim. Ladies, join me in loud cries for Jim."

Several of the ladies beset Mrs. Le Roy, who at last yielded so far as to ask if Jim were present. A sharp affirmative rap responded, and after an interval, during which the spectators peered anx-

iously into the dark box, a sort of dull fumbling was heard, and another materialization was evidently in progress.

"You can't see the hand of a gentleman of Jim's complexion against that black cloth," said Hatch, rising. "Lend me your handkerchiefs, ladies. James has a salt and sullen rheum offends him."

Several ladies made haste to offer their handkerchiefs, and, leaning over, Hatch draped them about the bottom of the box. The flaps were again agitated, and a large black hand showed itself distinctly against the white ground formed by the handkerchiefs. It was hailed with a burst of ecstasy from all those who seemed to be frequenters of these séances, and it wagged an awkward salutation to the company.

"Good for you, good for you, James!" said Hatch, approvingly. "Rings? Wish to adorn your person, James?" he continued. The hand gesticulated an imaginable assent to this proposal, and Hatch gravely said, "Your rings, ladies." A half dozen were passed to him, and he contrived, with some trouble, to slip them on the fingers of the hand, which continually moved itself, in spite of many caressing demands from the ladies (with whom Jim was apparently a favorite spectre) that he would hold still, and Hatch's repeated admonition that he should moderate his transports. When the rings were all in place, the hand was still dissatisfied, as it seemed, and beckoned toward Egeria. "Want Miss Boynton's ring?" asked Hatch.

The girl gave a start, involuntarily laying hold of the ring, and Dr. Boynton said instantly, "He cannot have it. The ring was her mother's." This drew general attention to Miss Boynton's ring: it was what is called a marchioness ring, and was set with a long, black stone, sharply pointed at either end.

"All right; beg pardon, doctor," said Hatch, respectfully; but the hand, after a moment's hesitation, sank through the aperture, as if in dudgeon, and was heard knocking off the rings against the table underneath. This seemed a climax for which the familiars of the house had been waiting. The ladies who had lent their rings to Mr. Hatch, and had joined their coaxing voices to his in entreating the black hand to be quiet, now rose with a rustle of drapery, and joyously cackled satisfaction in Jim's characteristic behavior.

"That is the last," Mrs. Le Roy announced, and withdrew. Some one turned on the light, and Hatch began to pick up the rings under the table; this was the occasion of renewed delight in Jim on the part of the ladies to whom Hatch restored their property.

"Would you like to look under the table?" asked Dr. Boynton of Ford, politely lifting the cloth and throwing it back.

"I don't care to look," said Ford, remaining seated, and keeping the same impassive face with which he had witnessed all the shows of the séance.

Dr. Boynton directed a glance of invitation at

Phillips, who stooped and peered curiously at the under side of the table, and then passed his hand over the carpet beneath the aperture. "No signs of a trap?" suggested the doctor.

"No, quite solid," said Phillips.

"These things are evidently merely in their inception," remarked the doctor, candidly. "I would n't advise their implicit acceptation under all circumstances, but here the conditions strike me as simple and really very fair."

"I 've been very greatly interested indeed," said Phillips, "and I should n't at all attempt to explain what I 've seen."

"We shall now try our own experiment," said the doctor, looking round at the windows, through the blinds and curtains of which the early twilight was stealing. "Mr. Hatch, will you put up the battening?" While Hatch made haste to darken the windows completely with some light wooden sheathings prepared for the purpose, Dr. Boynton included Ford also in his explanation. "What we are about to do requires the exclusion of all light. These intelligences, whatever they are, that visit us seem peculiarly sensitive to certain qualities of light; they sometimes endure candles pretty well, but they dislike gas even more than daylight, and we shall shut that off entirely. Yes, my dear," he said, turning lightly toward his daughter, who, apparently relieved from the spell under which she had sat throughout the séance, now approached him, and addressed him some entreaty in a low

tone, to which the anxiety of her serious face gave its effect. Ford watched them narrowly while they spoke together; she evidently beseeching, and her father urging with a sort of obdurate kindness, from which she turned at last in despair, and sat listlessly down again in her place. One might have interpreted the substance of their difference as light or weighty, but there could be no doubt of its result in the girl's reluctant obedience. She sat with her long hands in her lap and her eyes downcast, while the young man bent his glance upon her with a somewhat softened curiosity. Phillips drew up a chair beside her, and began to address her some evening-party conversation, to which, after her first terrified start at the sound of his voice, she listened with a look of dull mystification, and a vague and monosyllabic comment. He was in the midst of this difficult part when Dr. Boynton announced that the preparations were now perfect, and invited the company to seat themselves in a circle around his daughter, from whose side Phillips was necessarily driven. Mrs. Le Roy reëntered, and after a survey of the forming circle took her place with the rest. Dr. Boynton instantly shut off the gas, and several of the circle, led by Miss Merrill, began to sing. It was music in a minor key, and as the sound of it fell the air was suddenly filled with noises of a heterogeneous variety. Voices whispered here and there, overhead and, as it appeared, underfoot; a fan was caught up, and each person in the circle was swiftly and violently fanned; a

music-box, placed on Phillips's knee, was wound up, and then set floating, as it seemed, through the air; rings were snatched from some fingers and roughly thrust upon others, amidst the cries and nervous laughter of the women.

Through all, the mystical voices continued, and now they began to be recognized by different persons in the circle. The mother of one briefly visited him, and exhorted him to have faith in a life to come; the little sister of another revealed that she could never tell the beauty of the spirit-land; a lady cried out, "Oh, John, is that you kissing me?" to which a hollow whisper answered, "Yes; persevere, and all will be well." Suddenly a sharp smack was heard, and another lady, whose chubbiness had no doubt commended her as a medium for this sort of communication, exclaimed, with a hysterical laugh, "Oh, here 's Jim, again! He 's slapping me on the shoulder!" and in another instant this frolic ghost had passed round the circle, slapping shoulders and knees in the absolute darkness with amazing precision.

Jim went as suddenly as he came, and then there was a lull in the demonstrations. They began again with the voices, amidst which was heard the rhythmic clapping of hands, as Egeria beat her palms together, to prove that she had no material agency in the feats performed. Then, one of the circle called out, "Oh, delicious! Somebody is pressing a perfumed handkerchief to my face!" "And mine!" "And mine!" came quickly from others.

"Be careful," warned the small voice of Mrs. Le Roy, "not to break the circle now, or some one will get hurt."

She had scarcely spoken, when there came a shriek of pain and terror, with the muffled noise of a struggle; then a fainter cry, and a fall to the floor.

All sprang to their feet in confusion.

"Egeria! Egeria!" shouted Dr. Boynton. The girl made no answer. "Oh, light the gas, light the gas!" he entreated; and now the crowning wonder of the séance appeared. A hand of bluish flame shone in the air, and was seen to hover near one of the gas-burners, which it touched; as the gas flashed up and the hand vanished, a groan of admiration burst forth, which was hardly checked by the spectacle that the strong light revealed.

Egeria lay stretched along the floor in a swoon, the masses of her yellow hair disordered and tossed about her pale face. Her arms were flung outward, and the hand on which she wore her ring showed a stain of blood, oozing from a cut in a finger next the ring; the hand must have been caught in a savage clutch, and the sharp point of the setting crushed into the tender flesh.

Ford was already on his knees beside the girl, over whose insensible face he bowed himself to lift her fallen head.

"I told you," said Mrs. Le Roy, "that some one would get hurt if anybody broke the circle."

"It has been a glorious time!" cried Dr. Boyn-

ton, with sparkling eyes, while he went about shaking hands with one and another. "It has surpassed my utmost hopes! We stand upon the verge of a great era! The whole history of supernaturalism shows nothing like it! The key to the mystery is found!"

The company thronged eagerly about him, some to ask what the key was, others to talk of the wonderful hand. Egeria was forgotten; she might have been trodden under foot but for the active efforts of Hatch, who cleared a circle about her, and at last managed to withdraw the doctor from his auditors and secure his attention for the young girl.

"Oh, a faint, a mere faint," he said, as he bent over her and touched her pulse. "The facts established are richly worth all they have cost. Ah!" he added, "we must have air to revive her."

"You won't get it in *this* crowd!" said Hatch, looking savagely round.

"We had better carry her to her room," said Mrs. Le Roy.

"Yes, yes; very good, very good!" cried the doctor, absently trying to gather the languid shape into his arms. He presently desisted, and turned again to the group which Hatch had forced aside, and began to talk of the luminous hand and its points of difference from the hands shown in the box.

Hatch glanced round after him in despair, and then, with a look at Ford, said, "*We* must manage it somehow." He bent over the inanimate girl,

and with consummate reverence and delicacy drew her into his arms, and made some steps toward the door.

"It won't do; you 're too little, Mr. Hatch," said Mrs. Le Roy, with brutal common sense. "You never could carry her up them stairs in the world. Give her to the other gentleman, and go and fetch Dr. Boynton, if you can ever get him away."

Hatch hesitated a moment, and with another look at Ford surrendered his burden to him. Ford received it as reverently as the other had given it; the beautiful face lay white upon his shoulder; the long, bright, disheveled hair fell over his arm; in his strong clasp he lifted her as lightly as if she had been indeed some pale phantom.

Phillips, standing aloof from the other group and intent upon this tableau, was able to describe it very effectively, a few evenings afterwards, to a lady who knew both himself and Ford well enough to enjoy it.

II.

Mr. Phillips's father had been in business on that obscure line which divides the wholesale merchant's social acceptability from the lost condition of the retail dealer. When he died, however, his son emerged forever from the social twilight in which the father had been content to remain. He took account of his means, and found that he had enough to live handsomely upon, not only without anything like shop-keeping, but without business of any sort, and he courageously resolved to be a man of leisure. He had certain tastes which qualified him for this life; he had read much, and he had traveled abroad. He joined a club convenient to the lodging which he kept in his paternal home, letting out the rest of the house to a thrifty woman whose interest it was that he should have nothing to complain of. Every morning, at nine precisely, he breakfasted at the club, beside one of the pleasantest windows; the sun came in there in the afternoon, and except in the winter months he dined at another table. His breakfast and his dinner were the chief events of a day which he had the wisdom to keep as like every other day as he could, unless for some very good reason. When he had finished

either meal, he turned over the newspapers and magazines, largely English, in the reading-room; after dinner he often dozed a few minutes in his chair. For the rest, he paid visits and went about to the picture stores and to the studios. Now and then he bought a painting, which in his hands turned out a good investment; but his passion was bricabrac, and he liked the excitement of the auction-room, where he picked up from time to time a rug, a queer vase, a colonial clock, a claw-footed table or chest of drawers, and added them to his stores.

He kept up with the current literature, and distilled from it a polite essence, with which he knew how to perfume his conversation in the measure agreeable to ladies willing to learn what it was distinguished to read. With many he was an authority in such matters, and with nearly all he was acceptable for a certain freshness of the susceptibilities, which he studiously preserved, growing them under glass, as it were, when it was past their natural seasons to flourish in the open air. Now and then one revolted against this artificial bloom, and declared that Mr. Phillips's emotions smelt of the watering-pot; but commonly they were well liked by the sex with which, even if he had not preferred, he would have been forced mainly to associate. There is no society but that of women for an idler in our country; the other men are busy and tired, with little patience and little sympathy for men who are not busy and tired.

Such men as Phillips consorted with were of the feminine temperament, like artists and musicians (he had a pretty taste in music); or else they were of the intensely masculine sort, like Ford, to whom he had attached himself. He liked to have their queer intimacy noted, and to talk of it with the ladies of his circle, finding it as much of a mystery as he could. At these times he treated his friend as a bit of *vertu*, telling at what length his lovely listener would of how he had happened to pick Ford up. He bore much from him in the way of contemptuous sarcasm; it illustrated the strange fascination which such a man as Ford had for such a man as Phillips. He lay in wait for his friend's characteristics, and when he had surprised this trait or that in him he was fond of exhibiting his capture.

The tie that bound Ford, on his part, to Phillips was not tangible; it was hardly more than force of habit, or like an indifferent yielding to the advances made by the latter. Doubtless the absence of any other intimacy had much to do with this apparent intimacy. They had as little in common in matters of taste as in temperament. Ford openly scorned bricabrac; he rarely went into society; for the ladies in whose company Phillips liked to bask he cared as slightly as for stamped leather or Saracenic tiles. He was not of Bostonian origin, and had come to the city a much younger man than we find him. He was known to a few persons of like tastes for his scientific stud-

ies, which he pursued somewhat fitfully, as his poverty, and that dark industry known as writing for the press, by which he eked out his poverty, permitted. He wrote a caustic style; and this, together with his brooding look and his taciturn and evasive habits, gave rise to conjecture that his past life concealed a disappointment in love, "Or perhaps," suggested a fair analyst, "in literature."

Several mornings after the séance at Mrs. Le Roy's, he sat on one of the many benches which the time found vacant in the Public Garden. It was yet far too early for the nurse-maids and their charges and suitors; the marble Venus of the fountain was surprised without her shower on; Mr. Ball's equestrian Washington drew his sword in solitude unbroken by a policeman upon Dr. Rimmer's Hamilton in Commonwealth Avenue; the whole precinct rested in patrician insensibility to the plebeian hour of seven; and Ford, if he had cared, would have been safe from the polite amaze of that neighborhood at finding one even of its remote acquaintance in those pleasure-grounds at that period of the day. He sat in a place which was habitual with him; for he lodged in one of the boarding-houses on a street near by, and he made the Public Garden the resort of such leisure as each day afforded him, seeking always the same seat under the same Kilmarnock willow, and suffering a sense of invasion when he found it taken. Commonly his leisure fell much later in the day; and he had now the aspect of a sleep-broken man, rather than the early riser who

takes the air on principle or from choice. He sat and gazed absently over at the pond, where the swans lay still on the still water, with their white reflections under them as distinct and substantial to the eye as their own bulk.

A few stragglers, looking as jaded as himself for the most part, lounged on the seats along the walks, or hung listless on the parapet of the bridge. The spiteful English sparrows scattered their sharp, irritating notes through the air, and quarreled about over the grass, or made love like the nagging lovers out of a lady's novel.

When Ford at last withdrew his absent eyes from the swans and looked up, he was aware of a large and flabby presence, which towered, in the sense that a lofty mold of jelly may be said to tower, on the path directly before him. In this he gradually recognized an acquaintance of the spiritual séance, and finally knew the mottled face of Mr. Eccles; the morning was unseasonably close and warm; his hat was off, and the breeze played with the hair that crept thinly over his crown; his shirt and collar were clean, but affected the spectator differently.

"A-r-r-h — good-morning!" he said, with a slow, hard smoothness, staring intently at Ford, with a set smile and shut teeth.

"How d' ye do!" answered Ford, without interest.

"Nice morning," said Mr. Eccles, turning half about, and describing it with a wave of his limp-rimmed silk hat.

"Very pleasant," assented Ford, making no motion to rise, and neither inviting nor forbidding further conversation.

"A habitual early riser?" suggested Mr. Eccles.

"No, I merely happen to be up."

"I rise early myself," said Mr. Eccles. "It is my digestion. I sleep badly." He looked, as he spoke, like a man who had never slept well. "Your friend, I presume, is not troubled in his digestion?"

"If you mean Mr. Phillips," replied Ford, with a cold ray of amusement, "I believe not. He makes it a matter of conscience to digest well."

"It is n't that, sir," said Mr. Eccles. "I have experimented in the matter a great deal. I have tried to digest well on principle, but that does not reach the root of the trouble. It may be alleviated by the proper influences; but this sourness" — he struck his stomach softly — "seems to be the material response to some spiritual ferment which we are at present powerless to escape. I am satisfied that the large majority of our indigestion, sir, comes from the existing imperfections of mediumization."

"Some philosophers attribute it to pie," said Ford, neutrally.

"That is a very superficial way of looking at it," returned Mr. Eccles. "If we could once establish the true relations with the other life, *pie* would n't stand in our way."

"I've no doubt that those who establish their

relations in the old-fashioned way, by dying, are not troubled by pie," said Ford.

"Oh, death is not necessary to a complete rapport," returned Mr. Eccles, somewhat impatiently. "I have long been satisfied of that. It may even prove an obstacle. What we want is to place ourselves in connection with the regions of order and peace. Till we can do this, we must feel the effects of the acidity, as I may call it, which characterizes the crude and unsettled spiritual existence reached by our present system of mediumization. We had an illustration of that the other night, sir, in the vulgar violence of the manifestations. I was ashamed that any person of refinement should have been invited to witness such a — a saturnalia. I should have withdrawn from the circle myself, at once, as soon as I perceived what the character of the communications was likely to be, if it had not been for my regard for Dr. Boynton and his daughter. There is no doubt in my mind, sir, that if we had then been in communication with ladies and gentlemen of the other life, the circle could have been broken with impunity. As it was, you saw the brutality with which the violation of a single condition was resented by the savage crew we had suffered to be called about us. They dreaded to lose an opportunity for riot. The consequence was that Miss Boynton's hand was caught and crushed till the setting of her ring cut to the bone; then she was flung to the ground. The only redeeming feature, the only hopeful aspect, of the affair was

the apparition which terminated the disgraceful scene. Undoubtedly the hand which turned on the gas was a celestial agency of the highest and purest type."

Ford let his gaze, which had been dwelling upon Mr. Eccles's face with cold scrutiny, drop to the ground. "I hope," he said, "that Miss Boynton has quite recovered from her — accident."

"It was a shock," returned Mr. Eccles, candidly, "and her physique is delicate. She is a mingling of the finest elements, but the proportions are so adjusted that the equilibrium is very easily disturbed. *Her* digestion, I should say, was normally very good. She is evidently in relation, for the most part, with settled and orderly essences." He again set his teeth, and shone upon Ford with a wide, joyless smile. He waited for a moment, and Ford making no sign of interest, he said "Good-morning," and towered tremulously away, carrying his hat in his hand, and letting his baldness take the breeze as he walked.

When he was gone, Ford sat in a long reverie, from which he was roused by the clock of the Arlington Street church striking eight, which was his breakfast hour. He rose, and strolled down the path and across the street to his lodging, which he entered with his latch-key. The other boarders, with their morning freshness of toilet upon them, were lounging or tripping down-stairs to breakfast, and met him with various degrees of interest, umbrage, and indifference in their salutation as he

went up. The men mostly growled at him, with settled dislike in their tones; some of the women beheld him with pique, others with kindly curiosity; one little lady, in a pretty morning-robe, warbled at him, as she swept her skirts aside to make room for him at the turn of the stairs, "Doing the early bird, Mr. Ford?"

"No; the early worm," he returned with as little effusion as he had lavished upon Mr. Eccles.

The lady gave him the slant of a laughing face, turned up at him, as she tripped down the stairs. "Don't disagree with the bird!" she said saucily. She had achieved celebrity among the other ladies by not being afraid of him.

He seemed not to think any answer necessary, and passed up two more flights to his room, which was small and in the rear of the house. It was cheerlessly furnished with a tumbled bed and two or three chairs and a large table, on which many papers and books, arranged in scrupulously neat order, left a small vacant space at one corner for writing, where some sheets of fresh manuscript lay. On the window seat were some chemical materials and apparatus; on the chimney shelf some faded photographs; a tobacco pouch and pipes. Ford's business was with the manuscript leaves, which he took up and tore carefully into small pieces. He flung these into the grate, and then, with a conscious air, lifted one of the pipes, and fingered it a moment before he turned to leave the room. It was as if he had not liked the witness of

his wonted environment of this act of his. He went on, down to breakfast, and took his place at a table as yet but sparsely tenanted. The lively lady of the stairs-landing was there; she sat long at meat, morning, noon, and night, not for the material, but for the mental refreshment; for she found that more people could be made to give some account of themselves there than anywhere else. She was sipping her coffee out of her spoon, and looking about her between sips, with a disengaged air, when Ford came in, and she fastened upon him over a good stretch of table, at once.

"Perhaps you went out so early in order to see a ghost, Mr. Ford?"

"Very likely," answered Ford, making a listless decision between the steak and the bacon.

"And did you?"

"What?"

"See one."

"They always charge people not to say."

"Ah, not nowadays! They want you to go and tell all about it. That's what I understand from Mr. Phillips." She sank back a little into herself, with her eyes resting quietly upon Ford's inattentive face, and her elbow brought gracefully to her side, and softly stirred her coffee. She was not of the society in which Mr. Phillips ordinarily moved, but was one of the interesting people on its borders whom his leisure allowed him to cultivate. She thus became in some sort of his world, — enough at least to know what was going on in it, and to

be referred to there as Mr. Phillips's bright little friend, by ladies who did not like her. She waited for Ford to speak in response to her last remark; but he was not one of those men who rush like air into any empty place; he had the gift of reticence, and the lady who had planned the vacuum beheld his self-control with admiration. It piqued her to fresh effort; she believed that his speaking was only a question of time. "Mr. Phillips," she went on, beginning to sip her coffee again, "gave me quite a glowing description of the Pythoness, as he called her; quite a Medea-like beauty, I should judge, — if it was her own hair."

"Mr. Phillips has a very catholic taste in female loveliness," said Ford.

"But really, now, Mr. Ford," said the lady, in a tone of alluring candor, "were n't you very much frightened?"

"I am constitutionally timid."

The lady laughed. "Then you were! What *did* you make of it all, Mr. Ford? What *do* you suppose made the cut in her hand? Don't you think she made it herself? You know Mr. Phillips likes mystery, and he would n't offer the least suggestion."

"Then I don't think it would be wise in me to hazard a guess. I don't see Mr. Perham, this morning," said Ford, lifting his eyes for the first time, and lazily looking at the vacant places about the lady.

She visibly honored him for this demonstration

upon her weak point. She was a good-natured creature, and she liked skillful manœuvring, especially in men, where it had the piquancy of a surprise. "Oh, no!" she smiled. "Poor Mr. Perham is not equal to these early breakfasts. If you were often down yourself, Mr. Ford, you would have noticed his absence before this. He lets me come down on condition that I bring him his modest chop with my own hand, when I come up. You have no idea what a truly amiable invalid is till you know Mr. Perham well."

Ford expressed no concern for the intimate character of Mr. Perham, and after some further toying with her spoon Mrs. Perham slipped back to her point of attack: "I don't know but I ought to make my excuses for trying to provoke you to talk of the matter."

"I don't mind your trying. But I should have been vexed if you had succeeded."

"Yes, that would have been a dead loss of material. I suppose you intend to write about it."

A flush passed over Ford's face, which Mrs. Perham gleefully noted. He replied, a little off his balance, that he had no intention of writing of it.

"Oh, then, you *have* written!" joyed Mrs. Perham.

Ford did not answer, but put his napkin into his ring, and rose from his chair, quitting the room with a faintly visible inclination toward the end of the table at which Mrs. Perham sat.

"Mrs. Perham, I don't see how you can bear to speak to that man," said one of the ladies.

"His manners are odious!" cried another.

"Oh, he *has* manners then — of some sort?" inquired a third. "I had n't observed."

"My dears," said Mrs. Perham, "he 's charming! He is as natural as the noble savage, and twice as handsome. I like those men who *show* their contempt of you. At least, they 're not hypocrites. And Mr. Ford's insolence has a sort of cold thrill about it that 's delicious. Few men can retreat with dignity. He was routed, just now, but he went off like see the conquering hero."

"He skulked off," said one of the unpersuaded.

"Skulked? Did he really skulk?" demanded Mrs. Perham. "I *wish* I could believe I had made him skulk. Mary, have you Mr. Perham's chop ready? I 'll take it up, — I said I took it."

Mrs. Perham laughed, and disappeared with her little tray, like a conjugal *Chocolatière*, and the ladies continued for a decent space to talk about Ford. Then they began to talk about her.

III.

Ford went back to his room, and turned over some new books which he had on his table for review. He could not make his choice among these volumes, or else he found them all unworthy; for after an absent glance at the deep chair in which he usually sat to read, he looked up his hat and went out, taking his way toward the shabbily adventurous street where the Boyntons had their lodgings.

Dr. Boynton met him at the door of his apartment with a smile of cheerful cordiality; but when Ford mentioned his encounter with Mr. Eccles, and expressed his hope that Miss Boynton was better, "Well, no," answered the doctor, "I cannot say that she is. She has had a shock, — a shock from which she may be days and even weeks in recovering." He rubbed his small, soft hands together, and beamed upon Ford's cold front almost rapturously.

"I am very sorry to hear it," said the latter, with a glance of misgiving.

"Yes, yes," admitted the other. "In some respects it is regrettable. But there are in this case, as in all others, countervailing advantages." He

settled himself comfortably in the corner of the sofa as he proceeded. "Yes. The whole episode, on its scientific side, has been eminently satisfactory. The character of the manifestations at the séance, the violence with which neglect of the conditions was resented, the subsequent effects, primary and secondary, on the nervous organism of the medium, and indeed of almost all persons present, have been singularly impressive, and indicative of novel and momentous developments. I don't know, Mr. Ford, whether you have had an opportunity of conversing with any of our friends, since the evening in question, but I have seen many of them, and they have all testified to an experience which, however difficult of formulation, was most distinct. It appears to have been something analogous to the electrization of persons in the vicinity of a point struck by lightning. In the case of Mrs. Le Roy there has scarcely been a cessation of the effects. The raps in her room have been almost continuous, and the furniture of the whole house has been affected. Miss Boynton has suffered the greatest distress from the continuance of the manifestations, and her mind is oppressed by influences which she is apparently powerless to throw off. In a word, everything has worked most harmoniously to the best advantage, and the progress made has been all that we could wish. Mr. Eccles perhaps told you of a marked increase of the discomfort he habitually suffers from indigestion?"

Ford hardly knew whether to laugh or rage at

all this, but he merely said that Mr. Eccles had mentioned his dyspepsia, and remained in a bitter indecision, while Dr. Boynton went on. "Ah, yes! yes, yes! I think we may safely refer the aggravation of his complaint to the influences, still active, of our memorable séance. But I am not sure that Mr. Eccles's peculiar theory is the correct one. I distrust his speculations in some degree. A ferment of the kind he speaks of in the world of spirits would be more apt to ultimate itself here in the mind than in the stomach."

"Do you generally distrust speculations in regard to these matters?" asked Ford.

"I distrust *all* special speculation," said the doctor. "We physicians know what specialism leads to in medicine. I prefer to base my convictions solely upon facts."

"Are you able to satisfy yourself as to the facts of the séance here, the other night?"

"Not absolutely, — no. Not entirely. As yet we are only able to approximate facts."

"Then as yet you have only approximated convictions?" asked Ford.

"As yet I am only inquiring," said the doctor, with sweet acquiescence. "Startling and significant as those manifestations were, I feel that I am still only an inquirer. But I feel also that I have gained certain points which will almost infallibly lead me to a final conclusion in the matter."

"Then you mean to say," pursued Ford, "that as a man of science you rose from Mrs. Le Roy's

experiments in sleight of hand, the other night, with a degree of satisfaction. Have you the slightest confidence in her powers?"

"Why, there," replied Boynton, "you touch upon a strange problem. I am always aware, in these matters, of an obscurity of motive and of opinion which will not allow me to make any explicit answer to such a question as yours."

"You obfuscate yourself before sitting down, as you darken the room, that you may be in a perfectly receptive condition?"

"Something of that nature, yes. But I should distinguish: I should say that the obfuscation, though voluntary, was very largely unconscious."

Ford laughed. "I am afraid that I was in no state to judge of the exhibition, then. You are a man of such candor yourself that I am sure you will not blame my frankness in telling you that I thought the whole apparitional performance a piece of gross trickery."

"Not at all, not at all!" cried Boynton, with friendly animation. "From one point your position is perfectly tenable, — perfectly. You will remember that I myself warned you of the possibility of deceit in the effects produced, and said that I always took part in such a séance with the full knowledge of this possibility. At the same time, I always try, for my own sake, and for the sake of the higher truth to be attained, to keep this knowledge in abeyance, — in the dark, as we were saying."

"I see," said Ford, dryly. He waited blankly a moment, while Boynton watched him with cheery interest. "I suppose it was my misfortune to have been able to expose the whole performance at any moment. I did n't think it worth while."

"It was *not* worth while," Boynton interposed. "Those people would not have accepted your exposé, — I can't say that I should have accepted it myself; and in your effort to fulfill a mission, a mere mechanical duty, to society, you might have placed obstacles in the way of the most extraordinary developments. Nothing is clearer to my mind," he proceeded impressively, "than that it is our business, after the first intimations of a desire for converse on the part of spirits, to afford them every possible facility, to suggest, to arrange, to prepare, agencies for their use. Suppose you had detected Madam Le Roy in the employment of stuffed gloves; at the very moment when you seized upon the artificial apparition, a *genuine* spirit hand might have been about to manifest itself, in obedience to the example given. My dear sir," cried Dr. Boynton, leaning from his perch on the sofa toward the place where Ford sat, "I have gone to the very bottom of this matter, and I find that in almost all cases there is a degree of solicitation on the part of mediums; that where this is most daring the results are most valuable; and what I wish now to establish as the central principle of spiritistic science is the principle of solicitationism. If the disembodied spirits do not voluntarily approach, invite them; if

they cannot manifest their presence, show them by example the ways and means of so doing. Depend upon it, the whole science must die out without some such direct and vigorous effort on our part."

He paused, leaving Ford in a strange perplexity. The smoothness and finish with which Boynton had formulated the preposterous ideas just expressed rendered it impossible for Ford to approach without irony a confession which he had meant to make in a different spirit. "Then you would not blame me if I had lost patience at any point of the game, and actively interfered in the process of solicitation?"

"As a mere exterior inquirer," returned Boynton, blandly, "I could not have blamed you."

"In the dark séance," said Ford, "I *did* interfere. It was my belief that Mrs. Le Roy was affording the agencies, as you express it, in that, too. It makes me sick to think that I should have hurt Miss Boynton, and if I could have suspected her of what I suspected Mrs. Le Roy I should never" —

"You were quite right," interrupted Dr. Boynton, courteously as before, but with a touch of pride. "My daughter was entirely irresponsible, for she was purely the passive instrument of my will; she was carrying out my plan — a plan which the sequel proved triumphantly successful."

"I have said what I wished to say," remarked Ford, rising. "I can well believe that she did only as she was bidden. There were other things that showed that. I leave you to settle with yourself

the little questions of honesty and decency in thrusting a helpless girl on the performance of a cheat like that. You seem to be well grounded in your great principle, and I dare say you won't be troubled by my opinions. But my opinion of *you*, Dr. Boynton, is that you are either the most unconscionable knave and quack I have ever seen, or "—

Boynton sprang to his feet. "Not another word, sir! I regret for the sake of human nature to find you a ruffian. But there my concern in you ceases. I defy you to do your worst! Leave the house!"

"You defy me!" said Ford, setting his teeth, and struggling with the rage into which he found himself hurried. "What do you defy me to? Do you suppose I am going to mix myself up in any public way with your affairs? You are perfectly safe to go on and gull imbeciles to the end of time, for all I care."

"I am an honest man!" retorted Dr. Boynton. "I have an unsullied life behind me, spent in the practice of an honorable profession and in earnest research into questions, into mysteries, on the solution of which the dearest hopes of the race repose. Who are you, to attaint me of unworthy motives, to cry pretender and impostor at me? I have met, in the course of my investigations, rude incredulity from the thoughtless crowds who witnessed them, and insolent disdain from those qualified to question, but too proud or too indolent to do so. Till now this indifference has only accused my judgment. It remained for you to asperse my motives."

Dr. Boynton looked the resentment of an outraged man; he gained, in spite of his flowing rhetoric, a dignity which he did not have before. Ford stared at him in momentary helplessness. He was at the disadvantage that every man must be whose habits of life and whose temperament remove him from personal encounter, and who meets others in that sort of intellectual struggle in which his antagonist is for the time necessarily passive.

"You arraign me as a cheat," resumed Boynton, "and you dare to judge my principle by the imperfect first steps of those who attempt to put it in practice, by the crudest preliminary processes. But even here you have no ground to stand upon. Even here the ultimate fact utterly defeats and annihilates your insolent assumptions."

"I don't know what you mean," began Ford, "and" —

"I will tell you what I mean," interrupted Boynton, "and you shall judge your own case. If all our endeavors at spirit intercourse were for the ends of selfish deception, as you claim, how do you account for the final response to them? I am willing to believe that it was *your* hand that inflicted a hurt upon a woman, — oh, whether my daughter or Mrs. Le Roy, it was still a woman, — and that invoked any possible consequence from the violation of conditions that you were bound in honor to respect; but *whose* hand was it that evolved itself from the darkness, and then dispersed that darkness? Whose hand was that which crowned my wildest hopes with success?"

"If you mean," said Ford, and he felt that after all it was shocking to own it, "the hand which turned on the gas, it was my hand."

"Your hand?" gasped Dr. Boynton.

"My hand — prepared by a trick so common and simple that it could have deceived no one but children, or men and women so eager for lies" —

"Oh, it was the truth, the sacred, vital, saving truth, they longed for! And it was this, it was this desire, you deluded!" Dr. Boynton hid his face in his handkerchief, and sank back upon the sofa. "Go, now," he said. "I will not, I cannot, I must not, hear one word of excuse from you. Your action is indefensible."

"Excuse?" cried Ford. "Do you really think I want to *excuse* myself? Do you think" —

"Why should you not wish to excuse yourself?" solemnly demanded Boynton, uncovering his face, which was pale, but calm. "You have dire need of excuse, if *sacrilege* is a crime."

"Sacrilege?" Ford was aware of forcing his laugh.

"Yes, sacrilege. You intruded upon religious aspirations to turn them into ridicule. You derided the hope of immortality itself, — the evidences through which thousands cling to the belief in God."

"You are such a very preposterous creature that I don't quite know how to take you," said Ford, "but I will ask you what you were doing yourself in making those simpletons think there were spirits present among them."

"I was leading them on to the evolution of a great truth, to the comfort of an assured immortality. But you, — were you aiming at anything higher than the gratification of the wretched vanity that delights in finding all endeavor as low and hopeless as its own? Oh, I know your position, young man! I know the attitude of those shallow sciences which trace man backward to the brute, and forward to the clod. Which of them do you profess? They all join in a cowardly contempt of phenomena which they will not examine; and if one of their followers, more just, more candid, than the rest, like Crookes, of London, ventures into the field of investigation, and dares to own the truth, they unite like a pack of wolves to destroy him. His methods are non-scientific! Bah! Did you think you were doing a fine thing, that day, when you lay in wait to dash our hopes, — to prove to us by the success of your trick that we were as the beasts that perish?"

"I can't say that I intended to trouble myself to expose you to them," said Ford.

"Then how much better were you," retorted Boynton, "than the worst you think of me? You call me an impostor. What were you but an impostor who wished to fool them to the top of their bent, for the sake of laughing them over in secret, or among others like yourself?"

"Here!" cried Ford. "I am sick of this foolery, and I warn you now that I will laugh *you* over with this whole city, if I know you to give

another séance or public exhibition of any sort here. I believe there are no laws that can reach you, but justice shall. I am going to put an end to your researches, in Boston at least."

"You threaten me, do you?" cried Dr. Boynton, following him in his retreat from the room. "You propose, in your small way, to play the tyrant, to fetter my action, to forbid me the exercise of my faculties in the pursuit of truth! And you think I shall regard your threats? Poh, I fling them in your face! I value them no more than I care for the miserable trick by which you have burlesqued without retarding my inquiries for an instant."

"Very well," retorted Ford, "we shall see!" He crushed on his hat, and left the house, Boynton pursuing him to the door, with noisy defiance, and remaining on the outer threshold to look after him.

IV.

Dr. Boynton watched Ford out of sight, and then, hot and flushed, turned back into the house. He did not return to the parlor, where the stormy scene had taken place between them, but went to his daughter's room. Egeria lay there in the twilight that befriended the shabbiness of the chamber, upon a lounge wheeled away from the wall, and at his entrance she asked, without lifting her eyes to his face (for women need not look at those dear to them, to know their moods), "What is it, father?"

"Nothing, nothing," panted her father, with a poor show of evasion.

"Yes, there is something," sadly persisted the girl. "Something has happened to worry you."

"Yes, you are right!" cried Dr. Boynton, with vehemence. "I have just met the grossest outrage and contumely from a man whom — whom — But, Egeria," he broke off, "tell me how you knew I was troubled. Did you hear angry talking?"

"No, I did n't hear anything. Who was the man, father?"

"Did you notice anything in my manner?"

"No, I saw nothing unusual."

"Then how did you know? Try to think, Egeria," said her father, eagerly. "Try to trace the processes of your intuition. This may be a very important clue, leading to the most significant results. How could you suspect, having heard nothing, and in this darkened room, having seen nothing, strange in my manner, — how could you divine that something had occurred to trouble me? How did you know it?"

"Oh, I suppose I knew it because I love you so, father. There was nothing strange in that. Oh, father, you promised me that you would n't speak of those things again, just yet. They wear my life out." He had drawn his chair, in his excitement, close to her couch, and sat leaning intently over her. She put her arm round his neck, and gently pulled his face down on her pillow for a moment. "Poor father! What was it vexed you?"

Boynton freed himself, instantly reverting with his first vehemence to the outrage he had suffered. "It was that young man, — that Ford, who was here the other night. He has gone, after heaping every insult upon me, — after telling me to my face that it was he who seized your hand in the dark séance, and produced by a trick the effect of the luminous spirit hand which turned on the gas. He dared to call me an impostor, to taunt me with forcing you to take part in my deceptions, — and this after the fullest and freest and frankest statement from me of the principle upon which I proceed in these experiments. And he ended by

threatening me — yes, by threatening me with public exposure if I gave another séance in this city. The insolent scoundrel! If I had been a younger man, I should have replied in the only fitting manner. As it was, I treated his threats with contempt. I answered him taunt for taunt, and I defied him to do his worst.. I a quack, — the shameless swindler! To take part in a mystery whose conditions bound him to good faith, and to defeat all its results by his miserable trickery!" Boynton started up and crossed the room. Suddenly he broke out, "Egeria, I don't believe him! I don't believe it was he who hurt you! I don't believe that he produced that effect of a luminous hand! I believe that in both cases supernatural agencies were at work; they must have been; and a man capable of wishing to defeat our experiments would be quite capable of claiming to have done so. He is a heartless liar, and so I will tell him in any public place. *He* forbid me to give another séance in Boston! *He* force me to quit this city in defeat and ignominy! I would perish first!"

"Oh, I wish we could go away! Oh, I wish we could go home!" moaned the girl, when the doctor's furious tirade had ended.

"Egeria!"

"Yes, father," said the girl, desperately; "I hate this wandering life; I 'm afraid of these strange people, with their talk and their tricks and their dupes, and your part with them."

"Egeria! This to your father? Do you join

that scoundrel in his insult to me? Do you wish to add a crueler sting to the pain I have suffered, — you who know how unselfish my motives are? Do you deny the power — the strange power — which you have yourself repeatedly exercised, and which you have not been able to analyze?"

"No, no, father," said the girl fondly, rising from where she lay, and going quickly to the chair into which her father had sunk, "I don't deny it, and I don't doubt *you*. *How* could I doubt you?" She sat down upon his knee, and drew his head against her breast. "But let's go away! Let us go back to the country, and think it all over again, and try to see more clearly what it is, and — and — *pray* about it!" She had dropped to her knees upon the floor, and held his hands beseechingly between her own. "Why should n't we go home?"

"Home! home!" repeated her father. "We have no home, Egeria! We might go back to that hole where I have stifled all my life; but we should starve there. My practice had dwindled to nothing, before we left; you know that. Their miserable bigotry could not tolerate my opinions. No, Egeria, we must make the world our home hereafter. We must be content to associate our names with the establishment of — of a supreme principle, and find our consolation where all the benefactors of mankind have found it, — in the grave." Boynton paused, as if he had too deeply wrought upon his own sensibilities; but he resumed with fresh animation: "But why look upon the dark side of

things, Egeria? Surely, you are better with me here than in that old house, where they would have taught you to distrust and despise me? You cannot regret having decided in my favor between your grandfather and me? If you do" —

"Oh, no, father! Never! You are all the world to me; I know how good you are, and I shall *never* doubt your truth, whatever happens. But go — let us go away from here — from this town, where we 've had nothing but trouble, where I 'm sure there 's some great trouble coming to us yet."

"Do you think so, Egeria?" asked her father with interest. "What makes you think so? What is the character, the purport, of your prescience?"

"It 's *no* prescience! It 's nothing. It 's only fear. Everything goes from me."

"That is very curious!" mused Boynton. "Could it be something in the local electric conditions?"

"Oh, father, father!" moaned the girl in despair.

"Well, well, my child! What is it, then?"

"You have quarreled with this — this Mr. Ford?"

"Yes, Egeria; I told you."

"And he has threatened you, if you stayed — threatened to do something — I don't know — against us?"

"I suppose he means to vilify me in the public prints."

"Oh, then don't provoke him, father, — don't provoke him. Let us go away."

"Why, Egeria, are you afraid for your father?"

"I'm afraid for myself," answered the girl, cowering nearer to her father. "He will come to see us, and I shall fail, and he will ruin you!"

"Egeria," said Dr. Boynton, "this is very interesting. I remember that on the day he came here — the day of the séance — you seemed to be similarly affected by his sphere, his presence. Can you analyze your feeling sufficiently, my child, to tell me why he should affect you in this way?"

"No," said Egeria.

"Do you remember any one else who has affected you as he has?"

"No, no one else."

"Very curious!" mused Dr. Boynton, with a pleased air of scientific inquiry. "Very curious, indeed! It opens up a wholly new field of investigation. All these things seem to proceed by a sort of indirection. We may be further from the result we were seeking than I supposed; but we may be upon the point of determining the nature of the chief obstacle in our way, and therefore — therefore — Um! Very strange, very strange! Egeria, I have felt myself, ever since we came to Boston, something singularly antagonistic in the conditions."

"Oh, then you 'll go away, won't you, father, — you 'll go away at once?" pleaded the girl.

"I am not sure," answered Dr. Boynton, in the same musing tone as before, "what our duty is in the premises. Suppose, Egeria," he continued with

spirit, — "suppose that this antagonistic influence were confined to a single person in a population of two hundred and fifty thousand souls; would it not be a striking proof of the vastness of the resistance already overcome by spiritistic science, and at the same time an — a — a — indication of responsibility in the matter which we ought not to shun?"

"I don't understand you, father," said Egeria, fearfully.

"I mean," replied her father, "that it may be our duty to sink all personal feeling in this matter, and bend every energy to the conviction, the conversion, of the person who thus antagonizes us."

The girl stood aghast, and for a moment did not reply, but glanced at her father's heated face and shining eyes in a sort of terror. Some instinct, perhaps, flashed upon her a fear against which the habit of her whole life rebelled, and kept her from directly opposing him. She subdued the tremor that ran through her, and answered, "You know that I think whatever you do, father. How — how" — She apparently wished to temporize, to catch at this thought and that; without uttering any, she stopped short.

"How should I go about it?" radiantly demanded her father. "In the openest, the simplest manner possible, by submitting your — your gift to the test of opposing wills; by inviting this man to a public contest, in which, laying prejudice aside, he and I should enter the lists against each other in a fair struggle for supremacy. I am not afraid of

the issue. In this view, he is no longer an enemy. He is a blind, opposing force of nature, which is simply to be overcome; he can no more have insulted or wronged me than the rock against which I strike in the dark, than the tempest that dashes its drops in my face. Poor, helpless, blameless obstacle! I am ashamed, Egeria, that I used harsh language to him; I am ashamed that I retorted from my vantage-ground the merely mechanical outrage which I suffered from him. My first business must be to — to — apologize; to seek him in a spirit of passive good feeling, and to invite him in a sentiment of the widest liberality to enter upon this rivalry; to — to" — He bustled about the room, seeking his hat. "It is my duty, it is my right, it is my sacred privilege, to go to him without a moment's delay, and withdraw every offensive expression that I may have used in the heat of — of — controversy; to solicit, upon whatever terms of personal humiliation he makes, his coöperation in this experiment; to conjure him by our common hopes of immortality" — Boynton had found that his hat was not in the room; he made a swift dash towards the door. Egeria flung herself against it, and, holding it fast, stretched out both her hands towards him.

"Wait!"

Her father suddenly arrested himself. "Egeria?"

"What — what" — the girl panted tumultuously, — "what — if I can't submit to the test?"

Boynton looked at her in stupefaction, as if this were a point that had not occurred to him; but she confronted him steadily. "You cannot refuse," he began.

"You have not considered this matter yet, father," said the girl. "You have not taken time" —

"Time, time!" retorted her father, with wild impatience. "There *is* no time! Eternity hems us in on all sides! It presses and invades at every point! The man may die; a wretched casualty — a falling timber on the street, a frightened horse, an open cellar-way — may snatch him from me before I can use him for the purpose to which Providence has appointed his being. And you talk of time! Come, my daughter, let me pass! You are not you, nor I I, in such a crisis as this."

The girl moved from the door, and cast her arms about his neck, as he quickly advanced. "Oh, father, father!" she cried, "what is it you mean to do?"

"Why, I have told you, child," he answered, putting up his hands to unclasp her arms.

"Yes; but if I failed?" she implored, clinging the closer. "Remember that I have been sick, that I am still very weak, and wait, — wait a little."

Boynton's mood changed instantly. "Ha!" he breathed, and continued in his tone of scientific investigation: "Are you sensible, Egeria, of any distinct loss of psychic force through the diminution of your physical strength?"

"How can I tell, father? It is you who do it. I see, or seem to see, whatever you tell me. I have always done that. It began so long ago, when I was so little, that I can't remember anything different. I *want* to please you; I *want* to help you; but I don't know if I can, father. It has always come from my thinking that what you wished was perfectly wise and right."

"Yes, yes," said Boynton, "that is of course a condition of the highest clairvoyant force, though I don't remember to have heard it formulated before."

"And don't you see, father," said the girl, looking tenderly into his face, as if she would fain interpose her love between him and what she must say, "that if I lose this perfect confidence I lose my power to do what you want me to do?"

Dr. Boynton was hurt through the shield of her affection. "Have I done anything to forfeit your trust in my purposes, Egeria? If I have, it is certainly time for me to despair."

"Oh, no, no, father! I trust *you;* I love you this moment more dearly than ever I did. But are you sure — are you sure that it will all come out as you think? Are you sure that we are taking the right way? We have been trying now a long while, and I can't see that we 've accomplished anything. Perhaps I 'm not a medium, but only a dreamer, and dream what you tell me. I 'm afraid sometimes it is n't right. I was thinking about it just before you came in. What if there *should* be nothing in it all?"

"*How* nothing in it?"

"What if you were deceiving yourself? I can't tell how much my wanting to please you makes me — Oh, I 'm afraid — I 'm afraid it 's all wrong."

"Egeria," said Dr. Boynton, severely, "I have often explained to you my principle in regard to these matters. These are the first steps. It is necessary that we should take them. Other steps will advance from the world of spirits to meet them. I am convinced — I *know* — that in your last séance we had direct proof of this; and I will yet compel, I will *extort* from that lying villain the confession that he had no agency in the things he claims to have done." Boynton had lost his compassionate sense of Ford as an irresponsible moral force, and as he walked up and down the floor he broke from time to time into expressions of vivid injuriousness. "Listen, Egeria: I respect your conscientious scruples, though they belong to a petty personal conscience that I hoped before this you had exchanged for the race-conscience that gives *me* perfect freedom to think and to act. I will set the matter before you, and you will see the logical sequence of my course. In the development of the phenomena which now agitate the world, mesmerism came first, and spiritism came second. I follow this providential order, and I begin with mesmerism. In this, the results are unquestioned in your case. You have been accustomed all your life to my controlling influence, my magnetic force, by

which you have seen, heard, touched, tasted, spoken, whatever I willed. I knew this and you knew it. A thousand successful experiments attest its truth. Well, when we come to deal with disembodied life, we have to deal with it as I deal with you. We have to show this life how to approach us; to suggest, to intimate, to demonstrate, the ways and means of communication with us. The only *perfectly* ascertained fact of spiritistic science is the rap. This, with the innumerable exposures and explanations which expose and explain all the other phenomena, remains a mystery, insoluble, whatever we attribute it to. But as a method of commerce with the other life, it is nearly worthless, — slow, vague, uncertain. We *must* advance beyond it, or retire forever from the border of the invisible world. Now, then, you see the unbroken chain of my reasoning, and as an investigator I take my stand boldly upon the necessity of first doing ourselves what we wish the spirits to do. A feeble sense of right and wrong may call it deceit; a vulgar nihilism may call it trickery; but the results will justify us, — they *have* justified us. What I wish to do now, Egeria, is to determine whether an opposing force of doubt, embodied in a powerful intellectual organism, such as this man's undoubtedly is, can annul, can annihilate, the progress we have made. We cannot meet this force too soon; for if it *is* able to do this, we may have to retrace all our steps and begin *de novo*."

Egeria listened drearily to her father's harangue,

and at the pause he now made she looked hopelessly at his eager face, and did not reply, though he evidently expected some answer from her.

"After all, Egeria," he resumed impatiently, "you have no manner of responsibility, moral or otherwise, in the affair. You have simply to yield yourself, as heretofore, to my will, and leave me to take the consequences. I will meet them all. But I wish, my daughter, to satisfy your minutest scruple. If you were acting in that séance upon the theories which you have often heard me advance; if you were supplying to the invisible agencies we had called about us the model, the prototype, the example, needed for communication with us; and if when that man seized your hand — granting that it *was* he who did so — you were yourself consciously doing any of the things supposed to be done by the spirits" —

"I tried to bring myself to it; but I could n't, father; I could n't!"

"Then — then," panted her father, in a tumult of rising excitement, "it was not *you* who did those things? It was not *you*" —

"No, no!" desolately answered the girl. "From the moment the windows were darkened till my hand was seized, I did nothing but sit quietly in the centre of the circle and strike my palms together, as Mrs. Le Roy told me."

"Thank God!" shouted Dr. Boynton, in an indescribable exaltation. "I *knew* I could not be wrong; I *knew* that you had no part in those

things. This is a glorious moment! This — this — is worth toiling and suffering and enduring any fate for!" He caught his daughter in his arms and pressed her to his heart, kissing her fondly and caressing her hair. "Now, *now*, everything is clear before me."

"I am so glad, father," Egeria began. "I was afraid you expected — that you would be disappointed — but indeed" —

"No, no! You were right! Your psychical perceptions were better than my logic. They taught you where to forbear. Your *conscience* — I am humiliated beyond expression to have undervalued it as a factor of our investigation — has brought us this splendid triumph. Egeria, we stand upon the threshold of the temple; its penetralia lie open before us; we have defeated death!"

The girl was perhaps too well used to the rhetorical ecstasies of her father to be either exalted or alarmed by them; and she now merely looked inquiringly at him.

"Don't you see, my dear," he continued with unabated transport, in reply to her look, "that if you did not do these things they were the results of supernatural agencies? It is this fact, ascertained now past all peradventure, that makes my heart leap."

"Oh!" murmured Egeria, despairingly.

"But I must not lose a moment, now. I must see this young man at once, and challenge him to the ordeal that will release you from his noxious

influence. I hope that I shall be able to treat him in the right spirit, and with the tenderness due an erring mind; I shall do my best, and I have every reason to be magnanimous. But his pretense of having performed by trick what was unquestionably the work of spirits is a thing that he must not urge too far. Or, yes, let him do so! I shall seek nothing of him but his consent to this contest. It may be for the general good that his discomfiture should not only be complete, but publicly complete."

"Don't go, father, — don't go!" implored Egeria, for sole answer and comment upon all this. "Let him alone, and let us go away."

"Go away?" cried her father. "Never! I must overrule you in this, my child," he continued caressingly. "I respect, I revere, your power; but it is out of regard for that power that I must combat your weaker mood. It demands of me, as it were, that I should ascertain all its conditions, and remove every obstacle to its exercise."

"Oh, I don't know what you mean," replied the girl, and broke into hopeless tears.

"You *will* know, Egeria," returned her father. "Not only shall I be clear to you, but you will be clear to yourself, as never before. I have now a clue that leads to final results, — the personal conscience in you, the race-conscience in me. I will be with you again in a little while, Egeria. Don't be troubled. Trust everything to me."

He made haste to get himself out of the room,

and pausing in the hall on the ground-floor long enough to secure the hat of a visitor of Mrs. Le Roy (who was then in a trance for the recovery of lost property belonging to this gentleman) he issued from the door to which he had lately followed Ford in their common rage. The owner of the hat had a larger head than Boynton, who, as he pushed his way along the street, with his face eagerly working from the excitement of his mind, had an effect at once alarming and grotesque; the squalid little children of the street shrank from his approach in terror, and followed his going with derision.

V.

Egeria had made a step after her father, as if to call him back, when he left the room, but she had turned again, and lain down upon her lounge without a word. It would have been useless to call him back; he could only have come to renew the scene that had passed between them, and the result would still have been the same.

From her despair there was but one refuge. She could appeal for help now only to the source of her terrors. The fact, hemming her inexorably in, pressed upon her excited brain with a strange, benumbing stress, in which there was yet all possible keenness of pain. Presently, it seemed as if she shrieked out with a cry that rang through the house. In reality she had uttered a little scream in response to a knock at the door.

"Oh, did I wake you?" asked the uncouth servant kindly, putting her head in.

"Yes — no — I was not asleep," answered Egeria, lifting her face from the pillow.

"There 's a gentleman in the parlor wants to see your father; and I don't know — well, I told him the doctor was out, but you was at home. Shall I say you 'll see him? He says you 'll do just as well."

Egeria sprang from her lounge, and flinging open a shutter began to arrange her hair. "Yes; please tell him I 'll come at once." At that moment she had but one sense, — the consciousness that Ford had come, and that she should have the courage to speak to him, and beseech him not to consent to her father's proposal. She did not know how or why she should have this courage, but all fear had left her. She hastily smoothed her hair and arranged her dress, and ran down the stairs into the parlor to encounter her enemy with such eagerness as a girl might show in hastening to greet her lover.

It was Mr. Hatch who came forward to meet her, and who took her hand. "Did n't expect to see me here, Miss Egeria? Well, I 'm rather surprised myself. But I had to come back from Philadelphia, before I 'd fairly got started on my grand rounds, and I thought I 'd make one more attempt to say good-by to the doctor and you."

"I understood — I thought " — began Egeria, her voice shaken with her disappointment, "I thought it was — it was " — She stopped, and tears came into her eyes.

"I 'm sorry it is n't, Miss Egeria," said Hatch kindly. "I would be willing to be anybody else in the world that you wanted to see."

"Oh, I did n't want to see them! I was afraid to see them, and I hoped they had come," answered Egeria.

Hatch smiled, but he looked at her compassion-

ately, his head set scrutinizingly on one side, while she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, and recovered herself in a sort of cold despair. "I want you to let me ask you what 's the matter, Miss Egeria," he said, impulsively. "You won't think I 'm trying to pry into your trouble?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well, we all know what the doctor is: he 's as good as gold, and as simple as a child, but he has n't got the practical virtues, — or vices, whichever you choose to call 'em. Now, you know, Miss Egeria, that I respect the doctor rather more than I should my own father, if I had one: has the doctor run short of money?"

"Oh, no, no! Not that I know of! It is n't that at all," Egeria hastened to say.

"Well, that 's one point gained," said Hatch. "I 'm glad of it. You 'll excuse my asking?"

"Yes, — oh, yes," she answered.

"Well, then, is it something that I can help you about? I don't care to know what it is, but I do want to help you. If I can, without knowing, you need n't tell me."

"You can't help me. But there 's no reason why you should n't know. You can't help me against my father, can you?" she asked, putting the case, as women do, at worse than the worst, so as to have the comfort of finding the truth short of the extreme. "How can any one help me against him?" Then, as Hatch stood waiting with a somewhat hopeless and wholly puzzled face, "He does n't mean any

harm," she hurried on distractedly, "but if he does it, he will kill me. He *has* done it, and nothing can save me! He 's talking with him this moment, and planning it all out; and when they are ready I shall have to go out before the people, and try it, and fail."

"Is it some test of your power?" asked Hatch.

"Yes," answered the girl. "That man who was here the other night — that Mr. Ford, — father has gone to him to get him to make some public appointment, and try whether I can do the things he says I can't do. He has been here. Father wants him to come and test it himself, and that 's what he 's gone to him for; and I know he will; and I can't do *anything* when he 's by."

She said no more, and Hatch began to walk up and down the room. Presently he stopped before her. "Well, Miss Egeria, there 's only one way out of it. The way is to go and talk to that fellow, and get him not to keep his appointment with your father, if he 's made one."

"For me to go? I thought of that; and then"—

"Oh, no," said Hatch, with a smile. "*I'll* do the going and talking. You make yourself easy about it. But after that, don't you think we could get your father to give this thing up, and go home?"

"Oh, *if* we only could!" cried the girl. "But it 's no use. I have been talking to him, and begging him to; but he 'll never go back in the world. He hates my grandfather."

"The old gentleman was rough on him; but you can't much wonder at it. I 'm not saying anything against the doctor, mind; I don't go back on *him;* I don't forget what he did for me. But we can talk about all that afterwards. What we 've got to do now is to go and beg off from that fellow. Good-by, Miss Egeria; I must n't lose time."

She stopped him. "I can't let you. It would be throwing blame on my father. I 'd rather let him kill me."

"Oh, I 'll make it all right about the doctor," said Hatch. "No one shall have a right to blame him for anything. Don't you be troubled. I 'll fix it. Don't worry!"

Egeria faltered. "You 'll only lose your time. It won't do any good."

"But you don't tell me not to go?"

"It won't do any good," she said.

"Well," said Hatch, "I 'm going to see this man, and then I 'm coming back to have a talk with the doctor. I want to go away to-morrow feeling first-rate, and I don't believe I *shall* feel just right unless you take the Eastern road back to Maine about the time I take the Boston and Albany for Omaha."

Egeria followed him from the room, and responded with a hopeless look to the bright nod with which he turned to her at the outer door. As it closed, she stood a moment in the dim entry, and then crept languidly up the stairs to her own room; she cast herself upon the lounge again, with her face to the wall, and lay there in the apathy which is the ref-

uge from overstress of feeling. The worst could not be worse than the worst; and whatever happened, it could but be another form, not another degree, of ill.

Hatch hurried upon his errand, and climbed, heated and panting, to Ford's room, and to a loud "Come in!" which followed his knock, he responded by entering and shutting the door behind him.

Ford stood before the fireplace, striking against the brick a burning paper with which he had been lighting his pipe. In this act, he looked round at Hatch over his shoulder, at first vaguely, and then with recognition, but not certainly with welcome. "Oh!" he said.

"Mr. Ford?" asked Hatch.

"Yes."

"I met you at Mrs. Le Roy's. I don't know whether you remember me."

"Yes, I do," said Ford. He drew two or three whiffs at his pipe. "Will you sit down? You know Mr. Phillips." He indicated with a motion of his head a third person, whose face, black against the window, Hatch had not made out.

At the mention of his name, Phillips came forward in his brisk way, and shook hands with Hatch. "Oh, yes," he said. "Mr. Hatch has n't forgotten me. I feel myself memorable since that night. I was then an element of the supernatural. Have you seen our friends lately?"

"Yes," said Hatch. "I 've just come from them."

"They 're well, I hope? Miss Boynton struck me as a most interesting person. Does n't her life of excitements wear upon her? Most young ladies find one world as much as they can stand; mingling in the society of two, as she does, must be rather fatiguing."

"Miss Boynton is n't very well, or, rather, she has n't been."

"Ah, I 'm sorry to hear that," said Phillips. "I hope it 's nothing serious."

"Well, no," replied Hatch, uneasily. He turned to Ford, who from his superior stature had been smoking down upon Phillips and himself. "Mr. Ford," he added, "I came here from Dr. Boynton's to see you."

"Yes?" said Ford.

Phillips made a polite movement in the direction of his hat. "I think I 'll be going, Ford," he explained.

"You can go," returned Ford, taking his pipe from his mouth, "but it is n't necessary. This gentleman can have nothing confidential to say to me. I 'd rather you 'd stay — for once."

"You 're so flattering," said Phillips, "that I *will* stay, if Mr. Hatch does n't object. My engagement 's at one."

"Oh, not at all," said Hatch, reluctantly. Ford had remained standing, with his back to the fireplace, and Hatch had not accepted his invitation, or his permission, to sit down. "As Mr. Phillips was at Mrs. Le Roy's that night, he might as well

hear what I have to say. Mr. Ford," he added abruptly, "I want you to do me a great favor."

"Why should I do you a great favor, Mr. Hatch?" asked Ford, while he looked with half-closed eyes at the ceiling, and blew a cloud of smoke above Hatch's head.

Hatch glanced sharply at him, to see whether he spoke in gratuitous insolence or ill-timed jest. He decided for the latter, apparently, for he returned jocosely, "Well, do yourself a great favor, then."

"I don't feel the need of that," said Ford. "What is it?"

"Has Dr. Boynton been here this morning?" asked Hatch, with the anxiety he could not hide.

"No," said Ford, taking out his pipe, and looking at him.

"Then that makes it a great deal easier. I want to ask you, when he comes, — I know he is coming, — to refuse the proposition he will make you."

"What proposition is Dr. Boynton coming to make me?" demanded Ford, with his pipe between his fingers.

Hatch faltered, and scanned Ford's unyielding face. "I shall have to tell you, of course. He is coming to propose a public test séance with you, in which Miss Boynton's powers shall be put to proof. I ask you to refuse it."

Ford did not change countenance, but Phillips, from the easy-chair into which he had cast himself, smiled, and studied now his friend's sad, cold visage, and now the eager, anxious face of Hatch.

"In whose behalf do you ask this?" Ford inquired, beginning to smoke again. "By what right do you ask it?"

"Miss Boynton has been sick, and is still very much unstrung. It would be a kindness, a mercy, to her, if you would refuse."

"How do you know? Do you ask it from her?"

Hatch hesitated in an interval of silence that prolonged itself painfully.

"I don't come at her request," he said, at last.

Ford made no comment, but continued to smoke. His pipe died out; he struck a match and kindled it again; and then smoked as before. "Mr. Hatch," he asked finally, "are you a spiritualist?"

"I am a spiritualist, but I am not a fool," replied Hatch.

"Then you don't care for the effect of this séance on the fortunes of your creed?"

"No, I don't. I care for the effect of it on a young lady who dreads it, and who — and on a man that I owe a good deal to. Look here, Mr. Ford; I don't decide on these things. I suppose spiritualism is a matter of faith, like other religions. These people are in earnest about it; that is, Dr. Boynton is, and his daughter thinks and does whatever he tells her to. I'm sorry they're in the business, and I wish they were out of it. They're good people, and as innocent as babies, both of 'em. I don't like the way you take with me, but you can walk over me as much as you like, if only you'll grant this favor. I'm in hopes to get them back

to where they belong. I used to live in their town, and I know all about them. He 's a visionary, but he 's a good man, and their people are first-rate people. I would do anything I could for him. He 's got a heart as tender as a child."

"Very likely," said Ford, with irony. "But I fail to see why I should let this child-like philanthropist go about preying upon the public. I may have my own opinion of his innocence. What if I told you I had detected them in a trick the other night?"

"I should n't believe you," answered Hatch, promptly.

Phillips half started out of his chair, but Ford smoked on unperturbed, and asked, as if the question were a pure abstraction, "Why?"

"Because I know that they *could n't* cheat."

"But if I told you they did, should you consider them innocent?"

"I should n't doubt them in the least. And let me tell you" —

Ford turned his back upon Hatch, and knocked the ashes of his pipe out against the corner of the chimney-piece. "Mr. Hatch, you said, a moment ago, that you were a spiritualist, but not a fool. I shall not say whether I will or will not refuse Dr. Boynton's proposition."

Ford began to fill his pipe again, and paid not enough regard to Hatch's presence to seem to wish him away; it was quite as if he were not there, so far as Ford was concerned.

"Look here," Hatch began, "I am sorry that I offended you. I 'm anxious to get you to say that you won't accept Dr. Boynton's challenge."

"I perceive that you are anxious," assented Ford.

"Oh, if I only — It 's a very serious matter, — it is indeed! I would do anything to get you to say that. Come, now! The young lady is in delicate health; she will do whatever her father tells her, and if she does this I believe it will kill her."

Ford made no reply.

"I can see the thing from your point of view. I suppose you feel that you have a public duty to perform, and all that sort of thing. Well, now, I 'm going to make a strong move to get Dr. Boynton out of this business, any way; and I ask you just to hold on till I have a chance to try. Can't you tell him that you 'll think it over? Can't you go so far as to put him off a day, or half a day?"

Ford took a book, and going to a chair at the window began to look into it.

"Come," pleaded the other, "give me some sort of answer."

Ford seemed not to have heard him.

"Well, sir," said Hatch, "I 've done with you!" He stared at Ford in even more amaze than anger, and after waiting a moment, as if searching his mind for some fitting reproach, he turned and went out of the room.

Phillips rose from his chair with a shrug. "My dear fellow," he said, "I hope you 'll let me know when this ordeal takes place."

"What ordeal?" asked Ford, without looking up from his book.

"Surely I need n't specify your public test séance with the Pythoness and her papa."

"I am not going to meet Dr. Boynton in the way you mean," returned Ford, quietly.

"No? Why, this is magnanimity!"

"I 've no doubt it 's inconceivable to you."

"Not at all! I know you better; you could be magnanimous to carry a point. But it must be inconceivable to our friend who has just left us. I fancied he was something in leather. Should you say shoes, or leather generally?"

Ford scorned to notice the conjecture as to Hatch's business. "Are you fool enough to suppose that Dr. Boynton ever intended to come to me on such an errand?"

"Why, I fancied so."

"You had better bridle your fancy, then. He has too much method in his madness for that. What he wanted was my refusal, beforehand, for professional use. He did n't get it. This fellow is part of the game. But I don't wonder you sympathize with him. He is a brother *dilettante*, it seems. He dabbles in ghosts as you dabble in bricabrac. He believes as much in ghosts as you believe in your Bonifazios. They may be genuine; in the mean time, you like to talk as if they were. Upon the whole, I believe I prefer blind superstition."

"Why, so do I," said Phillips. "The trouble

is to get your blind superstition. I confess that when I was at Mrs. Le Roy's, — what an uncommonly good factitious name for the profession! — and saw the performances of the phantom-like Egeria, — *that 's* a good name, too! — I experienced a very agreeable sensation of fear. It was really something to be proud of. But it would n't last. It haunted me for a night or two; but I 'm no more afraid in the dark now than I was before. And the worst of it is that my interest in the affair is gone with my terrors. Apparitions have palled upon me. It is quite as the good doctor said: people bore themselves with séances very soon. The question at present is, Will you go with me to Mrs. Burton's to lunch?"

"No," said Ford.

"You 're in the wrong, Ford," argued Phillips. "You would please Mrs. Burton by coming; but it won't matter to her if you don't. That 's the attitude of society towards the individual, and upon the whole one can't complain of it. You had better come. Mrs. Burton is really making a very pretty fist at a *salon*. In the first place, she keeps Burton out of the way: it 's essential to a *salon* not to have the husband in it. You will meet the passing Englishman there, whoever he is; you stand a chance of seeing the starring actor or actress, — operatic or dramatic; authors we have always with us, and painters, of course. Mrs. Burton is so far from pretty herself that she is not afraid to ask charming women who are also beau-

tiful; you 've no idea what decorative qualities beautiful women have. And then she introduces the purely American element, the visiting young lady. Really, she has an uncommon feeling for pretty girls; I never knew her to have an inharmonious young person staying with her yet; with her sense of values, the composition of her *salon* is delightful. Will you come? She told me to bring you; what excuse shall I make?"

"Tell her that I 'm not the sort of person to be brought."

"Oh, there you do yourself wrong. I shall be more just to her ideal of you. Good-by."

A knock was heard at the door, and Ford, without rising, growled, "Come in."

The door flew open, and Boynton burst into the room in the face of Phillips, who was just going out. He caught him by the hand.

"Why, Mr. Phillips, is it possible! This is doubly fortunate. Finding you and Mr. Ford together, — it 's more than I could have hoped! I consider it a privilege — a privilege, in the old religious sense — to be allowed to say in your presence what I wish to say to our good friend here. Mr. Ford, I wish Mr. Phillips to hear me ask your pardon — humbly ask your pardon — for the violent language I used towards you at my lodging an hour ago." Phillips grinned his triumph at Ford, but softened the derision to a smile, as he turned again to Boynton.

"Will you sit down?" said Ford, with grave kindness, and without any token of surprise.

"Thanks, thanks! But not till I have taken you by the hand." Boynton stretched forth his small hand, and took the mechanically granted hand of Ford. "I wish to say that I have unexpectedly been enabled to see the subject matter of our difference from your point of view, and that I now recognize not only the justice, but the necessity — the necessity by operation of an inflexible law — of your attitude. In all these things," continued Boynton, placing himself luxuriously in Ford's deep chair, and didactically pressing the tips of his fingers together, "there *is* a law which I had quite lost sight of, — the law of progression through the antagonism of opposites."

Phillips made an ironical murmur of assent and admiration; Ford remained silent.

"We are both, outside of our mere individual consciousness, blind forces. I affirm, you deny. We grind upon each other in the encounter of life, and a spark of light is evoked by the attrition. It was just so this morning: light was evoked by which I shall always see the correctness of your position and the error of mine. Understand me: I do not at all agree with you in your opinion of the phenomena; and I have come, so far as that is concerned, to cement our enmity, if I may so speak." He smiled upon Ford with caressing suavity. "But what I have come for first is to withdraw all offensive expressions, and to say that I approve, even in its extreme, of your action on the afternoon of the séance." He beamed upon Ford, and

then turned his triumphantly amiable face upon Phillips.

"Ford," said the latter, "this is very handsome!"

"Not at all, not at all!" cried Boynton; "simple duty, — self-interest, even. For I have a request to make of Mr. Ford, — a favor to ask. I wish Mr. Ford not only to continue steadfast in his opposition to my theories, but to assist me in a public exhibition, by antagonizing to the utmost of his power their application. I have learned from my daughter that she had no agency in the phenomena which we witnessed the other night, and of whose verity I am now perfectly convinced; and I wish Mr. Ford to join me in testing her supernatural gifts, either before a popular audience, or such persons, in considerable number, as we may select in common."

"I must refuse, Dr. Boynton," said Ford, gently.

Boynton's face fell. "I hope," he said, "you do not refuse because I have been remiss in not coming to you sooner."

"No," began Ford; but Boynton interrupted him.

"I started almost immediately upon your departure from my lodgings, to follow you up and make this application. But I was delayed by an accident: a child was run over in the street almost before my eyes, and was carried into the next apothecary's. The force of habit is strong; I remembered that I was a physician, and forgot the

larger in the lesser duty, till other attendance could be procured."

Ford frowned. "It has nothing to do with your delay. What you propose is quite out of my way. I could not consent to it on any conditions. I went to your séance the other day out of an idle whim. I don't care anything about the matter. I don't care whether there is any truth in your opinions, or any error in mine. I refuse because I am thoroughly indifferent to the whole thing."

Boynton rose, and buttoned his threadbare coat across his plump chest. "And you consider, sir," he said, "that you have incurred no responsibility towards me, towards humanity, by going as far as you have, and then refusing to proceed?"

"That is my feeling," said Ford, respectfully.

Boynton stood as if stupefied. "And — and — Excuse me, sir," he said, coming to himself, "if I remark upon the suddenness of your indifference. One hour ago, you threatened that if I pursued my inquiries in this city you would expose me, as I understood, in the public prints. You left me with that threat upon your lips."

Phillips looked inquiringly at Ford, who said, "I left you in a passion that I'm ashamed of. I have no idea of carrying out that threat."

"Poh, sir!" cried Boynton, with mounting scorn. "You refuse, not from indifference, but from the sense of your inability to cope with me in this test."

"I am willing you should think that," assented Ford.

"I call this gentleman to witness," said Boynton, "that you have slunk out of a contest which you have provoked, and that you are afraid to meet me upon terms even of your own choosing. An hour ago I parted with you in hate; I now leave you in contempt. Good morning, Mr. Phillips." Boynton had already turned his back upon Ford; he now strutted from the room without looking at him again.

"Our friend is violent," observed Phillips, when the door had closed upon him. Ford made no reply, and Phillips continued: "I fancied his accident rather too opportune."

"Very likely," said Ford.

"And you won't go with me to Mrs. Burton's?"

"No."

"I don't wonder at your indifference to society, with such really dramatic excitements in your own life. The matinée has been extraordinarily brilliant — for a matinée. They 're apt to be tame."

VI.

In spite of the defiant temper in which Boynton had quitted Ford's lodging, he reached his own in extreme dejection. He found Hatch with Egeria in the parlor.

"Well, my friend," he said, wringing Hatch's hand, as he passed him on his way from the door to the sofa, "I have met with a great disappointment." Neither Hatch nor Egeria questioned him, but after an exchange of anxious glances waited silently. "It is n't that I care for the frustration of my hopes; I *do* care for that; but that is a small matter compared with the loss of my faith in human nature, my reliance upon the willingness of man to make sacrifices tending to — to — solve, to unravel, our common riddle." He let his head fall upon his breast.

"Oh, father," pleaded Egeria tremulously, after the little dramatic pause which Boynton had let follow upon his period, "did you go to see him?"

"Yes," said her father.

"And did he — is he going to do it?"

Boynton lifted his head. "No," he said, solemnly; "he refuses." Egeria drew a long breath, and turned very pale. She seemed about to fall

from her chair, which she had drawn next the corner of the sofa on which he had thrown himself. Hatch made a movement toward her, but she recovered herself, and sat strongly upright.

"He refused?" she gasped.

"My dear friend," said her father, looking toward Hatch, while he took her cold hand and gently smoothed it, "I must explain that I have had two interviews with this man, and what their nature has been. He came here this morning to boast that it was he who caught Egeria's hand in the séance that day. I drove him from the house. Afterwards, upon conversing with Egeria, I learnt that the manifestations were really genuine, and that at the moment he caught her hand she had no agency whatever in their production."

Hatch looked at Egeria. "I could have bet my soul on that!"

"On learning this," pursued Boynton, "I at once determined to challenge him to a new test, in which he should pit his influence over Egeria against mine, and the public should decide upon the result. He has just refused the challenge, peremptorily and finally, and I have branded him as a coward in the presence of Mr. Phillips."

Boynton flung his daughter's hand away. Hatch and Egeria had the effect of refraining from looking at each other. At last the young fellow said, recovering something of his wonted cheery audacity, "Well, of course it 's a disappointment, doctor, but why not look at the bright side of it?"

"*What* bright side of it?" asked the doctor, tragically.

"Oh, it has its bright side," said Hatch, undauntedly. "It saves Miss Egeria from a good deal, and I 'm glad of that, for one."

The doctor mistook the word. "Ordeal! There is no ordeal; there could have been no question about the result!"

"Not with you or me. But there 's no use trying to deny it, — the public is against you, and would be glad to have her fail."

"Oh, yes, father: you know how it has always been," cried Egeria.

"The circumstances had never been propitious before; but now they were all with us. We *could* not have failed!" replied her father.

"Well, you might," said Hatch. "What do you think *did* produce the manifestations that day, doctor?"

"Do *you* ask that question?" demanded the doctor, in astonishment. "I answer, with an absolute certainty, such as I never reached before, the disembodied spirits of the dead!"

"I doubt it," said Hatch, quietly.

"You *doubt* it?" shouted Boynton, in amaze.

"Dr. Boynton, you 've told me twenty times that you would n't give a straw for manifestations that took place in the presence of a dozen persons. Now, what makes you pin your faith to what happened the other day?" Boynton was silent; all his reasons, so prompt and facile, seemed to have

forsaken him. "There were too many people on hand that day for me. You know I 'm as much interested in these things, doctor, as anybody, and I should be the last to give aid and comfort to the enemy; but I could n't go those materializations, and the dark séance was rather too dark for me. I 'll tell you what, doctor, I wish you 'd go back home, and start new." Hatch planted himself directly in front of Boynton, who looked at him with astonishment and rising indignation.

"By what right do you presume to advise me?" he asked, with stately emphasis.

"Well, by no right," said Hatch easily; "or else the right that I have from the good you 've always done me." The doctor waived away the sense of this with a gesture which was still stately, but no longer severe. "I only speak from my interest in you and Miss Egeria, here. I think it 's wearing on her, — wearing on you both."

"Has my daughter complained to you?" demanded Boynton, with more than his former hauteur, looking round at her. She returned his look with a glance of tender reproach, and Hatch answered: —

"No more than you, doctor. I 'm talking of what I see. And I think you 've made a wrong start. I think you 've made a mistake. You ought n't to have ever mixed yourself up with professional mediums. You were on the right tack at home. Now, I say, you just go back there, and you form a disinterested circle, — people that

have n't got money in it, — and you go on with your investigations there; and when you 've got a sure thing of it, you come out with it. But don't you do it *till* then! Heh?"

"There is reason in what you urge," replied Boynton; "or rather there *was* reason. But I have advanced beyond the point you indicate. I *have* got a sure thing of it, as you say. I am as fully persuaded of the reality of those manifestations as I am of my own existence."

"Which ones?" asked Hatch.

"Those in the dark séance, and" —

"I 'm *not!*" returned Hatch; "but I don't want you to take my opinion for proof against them. I 'm going to headquarters for that, and all I ask is, Don't you interfere with my little game." He took the doctor by the shoulders in a friendly caress, as he spoke, and then he rang the bell. The servant-girl put in her unkempt head at the door, with a look of surprise, after first going to the outer door, to see if the ring had come from there; evidently, she was not used to being rung for in-doors. "Ah, Mary — Jenny — Bridget — Susy — Polly — whatever it is," said Hatch; "you just ask Mrs. Le Roy to step here half a second, that 's a good girl, and I 'll dance at your wedding." The girl vanished, grinning. As the big woman appeared at the door, "Walk right in, Mrs. Le Roy," he called out, and she advanced questioningly, while he closed the door behind her. "Now it 's all among friends, you know, Mrs. Le Roy; we won't

keep you a minute. You know the doctor has some peculiar theories on this subject. We don't care about the materializations, — *they 're* all right; but you just tell us now how much you helped along in the dark séance, the other day."

"Well," said Mrs. Le Roy, with a sly look at each of her listeners, and a smile that ended in a small, thin chuckle, "give the spirits a chance, — that was the doctor's idea, as I understood it."

"Exactly," said Hatch, "and you *did* give 'em a chance?"

"Now, Mr. Hatch," said the huge sibyl, with a mixture of cunning and of that liking for Hatch which all women seemed to feel, "what are you up to?"

"I give you my word, Mrs. Le Roy, I 'm up to nothing you 'd object to. I just want to know how *much* of a chance you gave 'em."

Mrs. Le Roy hesitated a moment.

"Well, pretty much all they wanted, I guess," she answered, at length.

"Do you mean," said Boynton, "that *you* produced the phenomena in the dark séance?"

"Well, I did give the spirits a fair chance, as you may say," admitted Mrs. Le Roy, with some awe and some apparent pity for Boynton.

He dropped his face in his hands, and bowed his head against the back of the sofa. "Oh, woman, woman!" he groaned.

"The witness can now retire," said Hatch, and amid Mrs. Le Roy's protestations of good inten-

tion and regret, and her mystification as to what it all meant, he took her by her vast shoulders and pushed her out of the door. "You 're all right, Mrs. Le Roy," he explained. "See you again in half a second. Now, doctor," he continued, turning to the desperate figure on the sofa, "you see how it is. It 's just as I said; you 're on the wrong tack. You can't make any headway in connection with professional mediums. You can't have your theories applied in the right spirit. What you want to do is to back out and start new."

Boynton controlled himself, and, turning about, looked up at Hatch with a candor that was full of immediate courage and enterprise. "My friend, you are right! I see my error, now; but experience alone could have shown it to me. I have attempted to work in the public way, when I should have strictly confined myself to the social way. I see that my success depends upon the application of my theories by followers purely disinterested. It may be that no progress can be otherwise achieved, in psychological science. The experiment must be absolutely free from mercenary alloy."

"Yes," said Hatch; "if you let them see that there is money in it, you can't get an honest count. Human nature is too much for you."

"The true method," Boynton mused aloud, "would be first to form some sort of society, in which the material basis was secured, and in which there would thus be leisure and disposition for the higher research. There are elements in our own

neighborhood which could be as favorably operated with as — Yes, the result will be much slower than I thought; but in the end it will be sure, beyond all peradventure. Egeria!" he cried, starting up, "we will go home!"

"At once — now — to-day?" asked the girl, her pale cheeks flushing.

"This very hour. There is not a moment to be lost. Go and put our things together, child."

Egeria turned towards the door; then she came back towards Hatch. "We won't say good-by now, Miss Egeria. I shall be at the depot to see you off."

"Yes, don't delay," said her father, impatiently. "We will be off by the first train." She went out, and he mechanically carried his hand to his pocket. "We can't go!" he cried, as if a sudden pang had caught him. "I have n't five dollars in the world; we are in arrears for board. You see, my dear friend, there is no hope."

"Oh, yes, there is," said Hatch, with the ease of a man who had suspected something of this kind. "This gives me a chance to pay you my old bill, doctor."

"My dear sir, I hope you would n't offer me an affront," said Boynton, staying the hand with which Hatch was opening his porte-monnaie.

"That 's what I said to you when you would n't let me settle with you for my sickness, — or words to that effect."

"Mr. Hatch, you — move me!"

"How much do you owe Mrs. Le Roy?" asked Hatch.

"I have n't the least idea," replied Boynton. "It may be three weeks, — it may be two. How long have we been here?"

"We must ask Mrs. Le Roy that." Hatch rang again, and this time Mrs. Le Roy herself answered the bell. "The doctor 's going away, Mrs. Le Roy, and he wants to pay up."

"Well, I 'm real sorry," said the woman, who had her bonnet on, as if about to go out, "to *have* you go, Dr. Boynton, — you and Miss Egeria both. But I guess you better. I thought, may be, Mr. Hatch was up to something of that kind. I don't think you 're just fit for the business. You put too much dependence on other folks, and you 're sure to get exposed in the end. I don't suppose but what there 's as much truth in it as there is in anything," she said, by way of reservation.

Boynton answered nothing, and at a look from Hatch Mrs. Le Roy added, "Well, it 's two weeks, — thirty dollars in all." She took the money from Hatch and put it in the pocket of her dress. "Well, I 'm going out now, and I shall be gone till evening; so if I don't see you again, I 'll say good-by at once, Dr. Boynton. Come and see me when you 're up to Boston."

She held out her hand to Boynton, who refused it with a very short "No!" and a quick shake of the head. "You are a charlatan," he added, — "an impostor."

Mrs. Le Roy stared at him, until his meaning dawned upon her. Then it amused her through her whole huge person, which shook with her enjoyment. "Why, land alive, man! what are *you?*"

"Something quite beyond your comprehension," replied Boynton, with overwhelming state.

"Well, well!" said Mrs. Le Roy, as she went contentedly out of the room, "you certainly *are* a new kind of fool."

They heard the stairs creak under her tread, as she went slowly and comfortably up; then they heard her voice, as she made her adieux to Egeria, who was probably too dimly informed as to her father's point of honor to be able to take her stand upon it. "Poor child!" they heard Mrs. Le Roy's voice saying, "I hope you 'll stay at home, and get well rested. You look half sick, now. Good-by. I wish I could stay and see you off. But I can't. I 've got a see-aunts with a patient of mine at her house, and I suppose I must go." She added in a louder tone, for the listeners below, "Take care of that poor old father of yours, and don't let him excite himself. *I* should be afraid he 'd go out of his head, — if he was mine."

Hatch looked at his watch. "You won't be able to get the two o'clock train," he said. "But I 'll tell you what," he added: "you don't want to stay here to-night, after what 's passed between you and Mrs. Le Roy, and you can take the five o'clock train on the Fitchburg road as far as Ayer Junction, and there you can connect with a train on the new road to Portland. You 'll have a little night travel."

"Oh, that will make no difference," said the doctor. "I would rather travel all night than stay here. I feel that if I'm to begin anew I can't begin too soon. I shall be eternally grateful to you for your suggestion, my dear friend. I am sure now that it is in the right direction."

"Good!" said Hatch. "I shall not leave till nine o'clock on the Albany road, and I shall have plenty of time to see you off. You 'll have to bank with me to the extent of tickets home, and I 'll have to come down any way and get them for you: I have n't the money about me for them, now."

Hatch seemed to think that the doctor might take offense at this, but he merely said, "Yes, yes; quite right," and gave his hand dreamily, as the young man went out.

"Tell Miss Egeria I will meet you at the depot. Be there with you half an hour before the train starts."

"Thanks," said Boynton, and hardly waited for him to be gone before he lapsed into the easy corner of the sofa, apparently forgetful of all that had vexed him; his face was eager with the rush of his hopes and purposes, as he abandoned himself to a sort of intense reverie. At times he rose and walked the floor, but mostly he kept his place on the sofa. He took no counsel with Egeria, and he gave her no help in the work of packing, about which she went swiftly in the rooms overhead. It was not a great work, and it was finished before his reverie was ended. She looked in at the door when it was

done, dressed for going out in a costume which was at once fantastic and shabby. In her village life it had once been her best dress, and it looked as if there had subsequently been some sketchy attempts to make it over into a street costume for city use; her bonnet was of a former season; her soiled gloves were frayed at more than one of the fingers. "I shall be back in a minute, father," she said, buttoning one of the poor gloves. "I 'm going out on an errand." He looked at her, but did not seem to see her, and she passed on out.

At the next corner she stepped, after a hesitation at the door, into a little shop where they sold newspapers and stationery, and bought a few sheets of note-paper and envelopes, halting some time in her choice, and finally deciding on some paper of an outlandish color and envelopes of a rhomboid shape: they were not in good taste, but they were recommended to Egeria as a kind that the shopwoman "sold a *great* many of." Returning to her own room she wrote a letter, which, when finished, she tore up, hiding the fragments in her pocket; she began a second, which she also destroyed; at last she took the pieces of the first, and carefully putting them together copied them slowly in the small, painful hand of one neither acquainted with the bold angularities of the fashionable female scrawl, nor accustomed to write any hand.

At the letter-box in front of the Fitchburg depot she faltered a moment; then, for her father was pushing on into the building, she caught her letter from her pocket, and posted it.

VII.

Ford received Egeria's letter the next morning. He examined its outside, as people do that of letters coming to them in strange handwriting, and he bestowed a derisive curiosity upon the person who could choose that outlandish shape for a missive. A dashing hand might have authorized the form, but Egeria's hand was timid and feeble, and only heightened its absurdity. She had not quite known how to address him; she had decided at last to begin without that formality.

"I do not know why you refused what my father asked you to do; but we were imposed upon as well as you. You had a right to suspect us; but we had nothing to do with those things. If you knew about us at home you would not regret that you had refused.

"I felt grateful to you; but perhaps it is wrong to write. If it is, I can only say that I meant it truly and rightly.

"Egeria Boynton."

Ford read this note many times over, and then mused long upon it. But he put it by, at last, and did a good morning's work, and at one o'clock he gathered up the copy he had made, and carried it

out to the newspaper office. He found himself without appetite for the lunch at his boarding-house, and he wandered about, the early part of the afternoon, playing in his mind with a tendency which was drawing him in the direction of the Boyntons. The origin of all our impulses is obscure, and every motive from which we act is mixed. Even when it is simplest we like to feign that it is different from what it really is, and often we do not know what it is. It would be idle, then, to attempt to give the reason Ford alleged to himself for yielding to the attraction which he felt. His cheek flushed and his pulse quickened, as he mounted the steps to Mrs. Le Roy's door; but this was the mood, half shame and half thrilled expectation, of many people who rang her bell.

The door was set ajar by the servant, who revealed a three-quarters view of her face and a slice of her person in response to Ford's summons. He asked if Dr. Boynton or Miss Boynton were at home, and she answered that they were gone, adding, "I don't know as they 're gone for good;" and as he turned lingeringly away she said that Mrs. Le Roy was in.

"I 'll see her," rejoined Ford, and entered.

Mrs. Le Roy made him wait her coming some minutes. He must have been announced to her merely as a gentleman, for after greeting him first with "How do you do, sir?" she added, "Ah, *how* do you do?" as if upon recognition, and offered him her hand.

"I don't know that I ought to have troubled you," said Ford; "but I wished to ask when you expected Dr. Boynton back."

"Why, they ain't coming back!" exclaimed Mrs. Le Roy. "They 've gone home. Did n't she tell you so?"

"She? Who?" asked Ford.

"The girl."

"Miss Boynton?"

"Laws, no! The girl at the door."

"Oh!" replied Ford, in confusion. "No; she said she was n't certain."

"Well, they have."

Ford rose. After a moment's hesitation, he asked, "They live somewhere in Maine, I believe?"

"Yes, down there some'er's," assented Mrs. Le Roy, indifferently.

"Do you know their address?"

"Well, no, I don't," Mrs. Le Roy admitted. She asked, after a questioning glance at Ford, "Did you want to find out anything about them?"

"Yes," returned Ford.

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Le Roy, "I could give you a see-aunts."

"A *what?*"

"A see-aunts, — consult the spirits."

"Oh!" said Ford. "No, thanks. I have n't time now," he said, as he would put off an importunate barber who had offered him a shampoo. "I 'm sorry to have troubled you."

"Not at all," said Mrs. Le Roy, following him

out into the hall. "We have test see-auntses the first Sunday evenin' of every month. Should be pleased to see you any time."

"Thanks," said Ford.

At the head of the street he met Phillips, walking toward the Public Garden. "Ah," said Phillips, "I was thinking of you."

"Were you?" growled Ford.

"Yes. I wanted to ask if you 'd heard anything more of the Pythoness and her papa. They 're as curious an outcome of this bubble-and-squeak that we call our civilization as anything I know of. How did you find them?"

"I did n't find them; they 've gone away," said Ford, not caring to deny the imputation that he had been to look them up.

"Gone away? How extraordinary! Has the doctor found Boston such a barren field, after all? Ford, you 've deprived us of a phenomenon. You ought to have met him. It is n't often that a father comes and invites a young man to contest his control over his daughter. The contest is generally against the old gentleman's wishes. Where have they gone?"

"They 've gone home," replied Ford.

"And that is" —

"I don't know. In Maine, somewhere."

"I might have known, in Maine, — the land of Norembega, the mystical city. The witches settled Maine, when they were driven out of Salem. You will find all the witch names down there. Well,

I 'm sorry they 're gone. I had counted upon seeing more of them. One does n't often find such people in one's way. I 've been speculating about them since I saw you, and I find myself of two minds in regard to them, — just as I was before I began. I suppose we must consider them parts of a fraud; the question is whether they are conscious or unconscious parts of it. If they 're unconscious, it 's pathetic; if they 're conscious, they 're fascinating. I don't wonder you could n't keep away, — that you had to come and try for another interview with them. As for me, I wonder that I have n't fluttered about them continually ever since I first saw them. The girl is such a deliciously abnormal creature. It is girlhood at odds with itself. If she has been her father's 'subject' ever since childhood, of course none of the ordinary young girl interests have entered into her life. She has n't known the delight of dress and of dancing; she has n't had 'attentions;' upon my word, that 's very suggestive! It means that she 's kept a child-like simplicity, and that she could go on and help out her father's purposes, no matter how tricky they were, with no more sense of guilt than a child who makes believe talk with imaginary visitors. Yes, the Pythoness could be innocent in the midst of fraud. Come, I call that a pretty conjecture!"

"Why do you waste it on me?" said Ford. "You could have made your fortune for the evening with that piece of quackery at the next place where you dine."

"Oh, it is n't lost," said Phillips. "I was n't wasting it; I was merely trying it on. Will you go with me to see a picture I 'm hesitating about?"

"No; you know I don't understand pictures."

"Ah, that 's the reason I want you to see it. You are the light of the public square, the average ignorance, — an element of criticism not to be despised."

"If I thought I could be of use," said Ford, "I 'd come."

"You can. But what is the matter? Why this common decency?"

"I owe you a debt of gratitude. You 've given shape to the infernal sophistry that was floating through my mind, and made it disgusting."

Phillips laughed. "About the Pythoness? My dear fellow, I 'm proud of that conjecture. It was worthy of Hawthorne."

VIII.

EGERIA and her father had reached the station an hour before their train was to start; and the time, after the first flush of their arrival, began to hang heavy on her father's hands. Now that he had set his face homeward, he was intolerant of delay. He looked at the waiting-room clock, and compared it with the clock above the tracks outside; he blamed Hatch for not being there to meet them, and fretted lest he should not come at all. It would be extremely embarrassing to be left behind, he said; he complained that it had the effect of placing him in a dependent position, and that Hatch had taken advantage of his temporary destitution to inflict a humiliation upon him. He said he would go out and look about the station while waiting, and he impatiently permitted Egeria to go with him. An idle throng were hanging about the draw of the Charlestown bridge, watching some men in a barge who were supplying air to a submarine diver at the bottom of the dock. The locality of the diver was indicated by the bubbles that rose and broke on the surface and floated away on the swift tide.

"Egeria," said her father, with instant specula-

tion, "if it were possible to isolate a medium thus absolutely from all adverse influences, great results might be expected. A speaking-tube of rubber, running from the mouth of the submerged medium" — He looked at the girl, who smiled faintly.

"I should n't have the courage to go under the water, — I should be afraid of the fish."

"At first, no doubt," replied her father. "But I was not thinking of you. I should like to see the experiment tried with Mrs. Le Roy."

Boynton was not jesting, and his daughter did not laugh at a proposal which would doubtless have amused the seeress herself. "How strange," said Egeria, as they turned away, "the western sky is!"

"Yes; the wind has changed to the east. The Probabilities, this morning, promised a storm."

"And the frames of all these railroad drawbridges against that strange sky" —

"Yes, yes," said her father; "they look like so many gibbets. It 's a homicidal sight, — or suicidal." He gave a little shiver, and they walked back into the station, where the train they were to take was just making up. Boynton looked about for Hatch, but was arrested in his impatient scrutiny of the others by the presence of two men, whose peaceful faces no less than their quaint dress distinguished them from the rest of the thickening crowd. They wore low-crowned, broad-brimmed hats of beaver; one was habited in a straight-skirted coat of drab, and the other in a like gar-

ment of dark blue; their feet, in broad, flat shoes, protruded from pantaloons of a conscientiously unfashionable pattern. Their hair hung long in their necks, and when one lifted his hat to wipe his forehead he showed his hair cut in front like a young lady's *bang*. They seemed quite at their ease under the glance of the passers, and talked quietly on, even when Boynton, expressing a doubt as to whether they were Quakers, halted Egeria, and lingered near them.

"That is so, Joseph," said one who seemed the younger, and was much the graver of the two. "It began with our people, and I think it will get its only true development among us. In the world outside, its professors are as bad as the hireling priesthood of the churches."

"Yee," assented he called Joseph, with that quaint corruption through which the people of his sect fail in the scriptural injunction they strive to obey.

"As soon as the money element touched it, it began to degenerate, and now it 's a trade, like any other. They are tempted all the while to eke it out with imposture."

"Nay, Elihu, not in all cases. At least, they don't yield to the temptation in all cases. You must not let your judgment be too much swayed by the single case that has come to your knowledge."

"They can't be Quakers," said Egeria, in a low voice; "they say 'you,' and not 'thee' and 'thou.'"

Her father did not answer; he pressed her hand

to make her keep silence, and insensibly drew her a little nearer to the men.

"Yee," replied the younger, "it is well to avoid a hasty judgment; but it is foolish to blind one's self to the facts. And the facts are that in such hands as this gift has fallen into in the world outside it is mere sorcery, — a spell to conjure with."

"Nay, it is something better than that. It is still a proof of life hereafter to those who could receive no other evidence."

"Yee, that may be. But I feel that it cannot truly prosper except with those who are leading the angelic life, here and now."

These words, these phrases, had visibly made a great impression upon Boynton. His daughter saw that he was longing to accost the speakers. But at that moment she caught sight of Hatch coming out of the ladies' room, and looking anxiously about as if seeking them.

"Oh!" she cried gladly, "there 's Mr. Hatch!" and she pulled her father away with her.

The two men turned at the sound of their going, and gazed after them.

"That is a strange couple," said he called Joseph. "Did you notice them as they stood here?"

"Yee, I saw them. They seemed to be listening. But we were not saying anything to be ashamed of, and I thought they could not receive any harm from overhearing us. They looked like stage players to me: before I was gathered in, I used often to see such folks."

"Do you think they are man and wife?"

"Nay, I don't know."

"He seemed too old to be her husband."

"That often happens in the world."

"Yee," said Joseph; "but I never like to see a young wife with an old husband. And there is something pleasing in a pretty young couple: they seem happy."

"Nay," returned the other, "what does it matter to us how they mate together?"

They stood looking after Egeria and her father, whom Hatch had now joined. "They seem to have found friends," said Joseph. "I don't think she is the elderly man's wife."

Hatch hurried them into the waiting-room; and then he went to buy their tickets, and have their baggage checked.

"I 've got your trunks checked, doctor," he said, when he returned and sat down beside them. "But you 'll have to change cars at Ayer Junction. You won't have any trouble, though: you just walk out of the end of the depot, and take the train standing across the track of the one you 've come on. You can stop at Portland, when you get there, or you can make the connection, and push right through, and be home by morning. I 've been looking it all up for you in this Guide." He drew a book out of his pocket.

"Oh, we shall want to push right through, sha'n't we, father?" asked Egeria.

But her father had apparently lost all concern in

the return home for which he had but now been so eager. He had listened with apathy to Hatch's excuses for his delay, and he had received with indifference the checks and tickets the young man had brought him. "We will see how we feel when we get to Portland," he answered testily, handing the money he had borrowed to Egeria. "Mr. Hatch," he added, presently, with the mystery in which he liked to involve simple things, "are you pressed for time?"

"I have all the time there is," replied Hatch, cheerily.

"Then oblige me by remaining here for a moment with Egeria, — for one moment only."

He left them, and they looked blankly at each other.

"Your father," Hatch began, "seems a little off the notion of going back."

"Yes," assented Egeria, dispiritedly.

"Well, of course; that 's the reaction. But he 'll be all right again when the train 's started. I know how that is. Miss Egeria," he added, looking down at the neat valise between his feet, "I did n't tell the doctor, but I hope you won't object to company part of your journey. I 'm going on your train as far as Ayer Junction." He met her look of amaze with one of triumphant kindliness. "Yes. You know I can go West Hoosac Tunnel way."

"I did n't know," said Egeria.

"Well, I can. And I thought I might be of use to you in changing cars at the Junction, and so I 'm going."

"I don't know what to say to you," Egeria murmured, brokenly.

"I thought you 'd be glad," said Hatch.

"Yes; only you do too much," returned the girl.

"Well, I 'm a little in debt to your father, yet; and I would do anything for — for your father. I hope you 'll make him push straight through to-night. I don't think your father 's quite well, Miss Egeria. He needs rest. He ought to be home."

"Yes, he needs rest," said Egeria sadly. "I 'm glad we 're going home. But you know how it is, there, between him and grandfather," she added, reluctantly. "I don't know just where we 'll go. We can't go to our old house; there are people in it; and father would n't go to grandfather's, after what 's passed."

"Oh, you 'll find friends there," said Hatch, hopefully. "At any rate, you 'll be among your kind of folks, and that 's something. And that reminds *me;* here 's a little note I want you to give your grandfather for me. I always liked the old gentleman," he added, giving her a letter. "He and I got along first-rate together. And I guess you can patch it up between him and your father."

"Mr. Hatch," said Egeria, looking at the letter — "Or no, no matter."

"What is it?"

"Nothing; merely something I was going to ask you, — to ask your advice. But it 's done now, and so it would be of no use."

Hatch laughed. "That 's the times ladies usually

apply for advice, — after a thing's done. And, as you say, it ain't of much use then, — at least, not for that occasion."

Egeria smiled sadly. "I suppose I wanted you to think I had done right."

"Well, I think that without your asking me."

Egeria put the letter away in her handbag, and put that carefully behind her on the seat, before she asked, a little tremulously, "Mr. Hatch, what do you think made him change his mind about it after he talked with you?"

An angry flush passed over Hatch's face, as he followed her meaning, and recalled the encounter of the morning. "I don't know. Such a man as that would n't need any reason. Perhaps he did n't change his mind. He might n't choose to let me know what he intended to do."

Boynton returned from the outside, and interrupted their talk.

"I went to see if I could find those two men," he said to Egeria. "Some remarks that they dropped had a peculiar interest for me. But they were gone. Did you notice them, Mr. Hatch? They stood near us when we first caught sight of you."

"Parties in broad-brims? Yes, I saw them. But I did n't notice them particularly. What were they talking about?"

"The life hereafter," said Boynton solemnly, "and the angelic life on earth."

"Well, I don't know about the last, but the first is a good subject for a railroad depot. Makes you

think whether you 've bought your insurance ticket. Quakers, I suppose."

"No, they were not Quakers," answered the doctor, with dry offense.

"Well, they looked it," said Hatch. "Perhaps they belonged to some of the new religious brotherhoods. I 've seen fellows going round with skirts down to their heels; I believe they 're pretty good fellows, too; they take care of the sick and poor. But I don't see why they can't do it in sack coats."

"It 's possible that these are of the brotherhood you mean," said the doctor. "I wish I could see them again." He looked vexed and disappointed.

"Well, you may run across 'em," returned Hatch, easily. "Perhaps they 'll be on our train." He added, at the doctor's inquiring look, "I 'm going to Troy by the tunnel route; I shall be with you as far as Ayer Junction."

"Oh," returned the doctor, with a little surprise, but with as little interest. "Is n't it time to go on board?"

"Guess we might as well," said Hatch, gathering up Egeria's things and her father's, beside his own compact luggage, and following Boynton, as he went out free-handed. Hatch had taken his berth in the sleeping-car, and he got them seats in this luxurious vehicle as far as the Junction. Boynton stared anxiously about the car, and walked up and down the aisle. "Remain here with Mr. Hatch a moment, Egeria," he said. "I will be back, presently."

Egeria made a little start of protest, but Hatch repressed her with a touch. "Let him go," he whispered, as the doctor pushed off. "He 's after those Corsican Brothers. They can't do him any harm, and they 'll occupy his mind. Who did you think they were?"

"I could n't tell," said Egeria. "I was sure they were Quakers; but they did n't use the plain language. I think father thought they were talking about the spirits," she added, dejectedly.

"Well, I 'm sorry for that," replied Hatch. "I think he 's got enough of the spirits for one while. But probably they were n't, if they 're any of those new kind of brothers. If they are, I hope he 'll find 'em. They can give him some talk on the other side."

The doctor came back, and sat down with an air of satisfaction. "I 've found them, Egeria," he said. "But the seats all about them were occupied, so that I could n't get a place near them. I overheard them say that they were going to Ayer, where friends are to meet them."

"Well, that 's lucky," Hatch interposed. "You may get a glimpse of them there. You 'll have to wait twenty minutes for connections. It 's surprising how much you can do in twenty minutes when you 're on the road. Why, twenty minutes on the road are as long as the good old twenty minutes a fellow used to have when he was a boy. But they won't go any further in the way of time, generally, than twenty dollars will in the way of

money, nowadays; we seem to have got an irredeemable paper currency in both things, since I grew up. I wish we could get back to a gold basis. I should like to see half a day or half a dollar of the old size. Why, doctor, you must remember when they were both as big as the full moon!"

The weather had been growing colder since morning, and though they had run out under clearer skies than those of the sea-board, the sun set at last in a series of cloudy bars, through which his red face looked as through the bars of a visor, before it dipped out of sight, and left the west pale and ashen. The lengthening twilight of the season prevailed over the landscape, sodden from long snow, and showing as yet no consciousness of the spring. It was sad and bare, and the girl shrank from its cold melancholy after a shivering glance. Presently her father rose and went into the next car.

"Going to make sure of his Brothers," said the young man. He looked at his watch. "We 're a little late; but I shall have time to see you on board the Portland train when we get to the Junction. We ought to have had the twenty minutes there together; but we sha'n't; my train leaves before yours does. I wish I was going on the whole way with you!"

"I wish you were," responded Egeria. "But you must n't lose any time when we get to the Junction; you might miss your own train."

"I could n't afford to do that. But there 'll be

time. Now, I 'll tell you what, Miss Egeria: I want you to write to me when you get home. You know I shall want to know you 've got there."

"Yes, I will," answered Egeria.

"There!" said Hatch, tearing a leaf from his pocket-book, in which he had written, "that 'll fetch me. I shall be a fortnight in Omaha before I push on to California. When I get back, in June, I 'm coming to see you!"

"You may be sure we shall be glad to have you," answered Egeria, putting the address in her bag. "I 'm so eager to get home, it seems as if I could fly. I 'd rather be in the grave-yard there than lead the life we have the last three months, I hope I shall never come away again!" she added, while the tears started to her eyes.

"Well, I hope you won't if you don't want to," said Hatch. "But I guess we won't talk about *grave-yards* in that connection. I 'm coming back to find you strong and well, and your father in the good old track again."

"Yes," murmured the girl.

The doctor came in and resumed his seat.

"Corsican Brothers all right?" asked Hatch.

"They are still there," replied the doctor, gravely accepting the designation.

"Well, you 'll have to cut it shorter than I thought for at Ayer," said Hatch. "We 're a little behind time. But I guess you can transact all the buiness you have with them in fifteen minutes."

"In fifteen minutes?" Boynton looked doubtful and unhappy.

"Why," said Hatch, with a laugh, "I 'll see that you get the whole time. I 'll find your train with Miss Egeria, and put her into it. You ought to have some supper, though. I 'll ask the Brothers to hold on till you 've had a cup of tea."

"I shall want nothing to eat," replied the doctor, excitedly. "If you will take charge of Egeria, I shall be obliged to you. I *must* speak to them."

"All right," said Hatch. "Don't be anxious," he whispered to Egeria, as they emerged into the crowd and clamor at the Junction. Locomotives were fuming and fretting under cover of the station; without, their bells were bleating everywhere; people ran to and fro, and were pushed about by men with long trucks; the baggage men hurled the trunks from one train to another, and called out the check numbers in metallic nasals. Hatch made his way with Egeria to the train standing across the Fitchburg track, and piled up her things in a seat. "Remember the train and car," he said, making her look round, when they came out again. "Now come get something to eat." He hurried her into the eating-room, and ordering supper he left her and went to find the doctor. It was some minutes before he returned with him, crest-fallen and disappointed.

"Did you see them?" asked Egeria, interpreting his gloom aright.

"No," said her father, "I have missed them."

"Good-by, doctor; good-by, Miss Egeria," said Hatch, who had been paying for the supper. "That's my train," he added, at the sound of a bell. "Good luck to you!"

Egeria clung to his hand. "But your supper!"

"That's the doctor's supper. I shall snatch a bite at Fitchburg."

"Oh!" moaned Egeria. But he was gone, and she turned to urge her father to eat.

"Oh, I want nothing, — I want nothing," he said, impatiently; but the girl pressed him, and after she had made him drink a cup of tea, she followed him out of the eating-room. At the door, he gave a joyful start. There, not ten paces away, were the men whom he had seen at the depot in Boston, and whom he had been so anxiously seeking. A third, dressed like them, and of a like placidity of countenance, was talking with them. Nothing now could prevent Boynton from accosting them. He launched himself towards them with an excitement strangely contrasting with their own calm.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I must beg your pardon for addressing you. But I saw you in the depot at Boston" —

"Yee," interrupted he called Elihu, tranquilly, "we saw you there."

"And — and — I chanced to overhear something in your conversation" —

"Yee," said the other, as before, "we saw you listening."

"Well, well! I confess it, — I confess it!" cried

Boynton, even more impatient than disconcerted. "I felt constrained to listen: your words seemed to me a message, a prophecy, a revelation. May I ask, gentlemen, if you were talking about spiritualism?"

"Yee, we were."

"Father, — father, we shall lose our train!" pleaded Egeria.

The three strange men, from studying Boynton intently, turned and looked kindly at her, while he continued, "And were you — you were — Gentlemen, this is a subject that interests me greatly, — vitally, I may say. Pardon me if I seem too bold. You were saying that this science, this dispensation, — this — this — call it what you will, — originated with some society of which you are members?"

"Yee."

The bell was ringing for their train to start; Egeria essayed another meek appeal of "Father, our train is going!" and was hushed with a harsh "Silence!" from Boynton, who eagerly pursued, "And this society — this — Gentlemen, what *are* you?"

"We are of the people called Shakers," replied Joseph.

"Exactly! Exactly! I see it, — I understand it all! I understand now how you can make the only just claim to the development of these phenomena. In your community alone is the unselfish, the self-devoted, basis to be found, without which we can rear no superstructure to the skies. I have wasted

my life!" he cried, — "wasted my life! Does your community live near here?"

"Yee," answered the eldest Shaker, cautiously, "some miles back. This brother has driven over from home."

"I wish to be one of you!" said the doctor.

"Nay," answered the Shaker, "that needs reflection."

A train began to cross the front of the station. Egeria's long-suffering broke in tears. At sight of her distress, the Shaker added, "Friend, there goes your train."

"Well, well!" exclaimed Boynton, distractedly, "you shall hear from me!" He turned with Egeria, and ran towards the cars, the Shakers following, and making signals to the engineer. The train moved slowly, and Egeria and her father scrambled aboard. She led the way to the rear car, in which her things were left; but on going to the seat midway of it which Hatch had chosen for her, she could not find them. She sank down, stupefied. Her father noticed neither her loss nor her distress. She waited hopelessly for the conductor's coming, and when he appeared she asked him timidly if he had seen her things. He said he would ask the brakeman about them, and added in the tone of formal demand, "Tickets!" The doctor surrendered them without looking at the conductor. "These tickets are for Portland," said the conductor. "You 're on the wrong train, — this is the down train."

"Oh, put us off, then, please," implored Egeria, "and we 'll walk back."

"Up train left before this did," said the man, "and you could n't get it any way."

"Oh, what shall we do!" lamented the girl. "How shall we ever get home?"

"I can take you on to Egerton; train does n't stop till we get there. You can go up on the morning express."

"But we can't pay!" gasped Egeria. "Our money was all in one of my bags!"

The conductor looked as if this might or might not be true. He glanced at Egeria's shabby dress, and his face hardened as he said, "I can take you to Egerton," and passed on.

Boynton had shown little concern in the matter, as if it were no affair of his. Egeria did not appeal to him for counsel or comfort, but sank back into her seat, and wept silently. In the twilight her tears could not be seen; when it grew darker, and the lamps were turned up, she averted her face, and stared out of the black window with streaming eyes.

When the train stopped, and the brakeman called "Egerton," she led her father from the car, and began to walk with him from the station up into the village.

IX.

EGERTON is a village that presents a winning aspect to the summer visitor when he goes thither in June, and finds it at peace with all the world, in the shadow of immemorial, uncanker-wormed elms. Its chief street wanders quaintly, with a pleasant rise and fall, and on either hand are the large square mansions of a former day, and the trim, well-kept French-roof villas of ours. Hammocks, with girls reading novels in them, are swung between door-yard trees; swift buggies go by on the wide, dustless street; the children of summer visitors, a little too well dressed, play in the cool paths; all day long there is lounging and light literature and smoking and flirtation on the piazzas of the big summer hotel. But the place is far from being a mere summer resort; it is a village, with its own life, expressed in comfortable homes, in a post-office, an apothecary's, a local bank, and various stores, all elm-embowered. A lovely country lies about it, dipping to a fertile valley on one side, and stretching on the other level and far, with an outlook to yet farther hills.

On the chilly April eve when Egeria and her father walked aimlessly away from the station up into the village, it did not wear the welcome it gives

the summer visitor. Here and there a lamp pierced the gathering night, and about the stores and post-office there was a languid stir; but the houses darkled away into the gloom of the country. A wind was rising; it took the elms over the street, and swung their long, pendulous boughs about under the sky, dully luminous with the coming storm.

The doctor had seemed carelessly indifferent about all that had happened; indeed, scarcely cognizant of it. He looked vaguely round as they passed through the space in front of the hotel. "Where are you going, Egeria?" he asked.

"I don't know. We have no money."

"No money?"

"You gave me the money, and I put it into my bag that was carried off on the train to Portland."

"Ah, true, true," responded her father, as if he granted the trivial point for argument's sake. He added, with a sort of philosophical interest in the fact, "Well, we are beggars now, — houseless beggars, who don't know how to beg! Yet I have no doubt there are doors enough on this street that would fly open at our touch, if it were known that we were without shelter and in need. Where shall we apply, my dear?"

"Oh, I don't know, — I don't know."

"All the houses seem dark," mused Boynton aloud. "If we rang, and made them the trouble of lighting hall and parlor lamps in the belief we were visitors, it would have a bad effect. We will stop at the first house where we see a light at the

front windows." But when they came to such a house, it seemed too brightly lighted, and they walked wearily by. At last, they paused before a door where the illumination was neither too brilliant nor too faint; and while they stood questioning themselves as to the form of their petition, the lamp at the window was suddenly blown out. They did not speak, but turned and kept on their way. They had passed through the denser part of the village, and the houses began to straggle at wider and wider intervals along the road. Presently they found themselves in the open country, between meadows and fields, with what seemed a long stretch of forest in front of them. But before they reached it they came to a wayside country store, in front of which they halted.

"I have an idea, Egeria," said her father. "I will step into this store and pledge your ring for a night's lodging."

"Well," said Egeria, yielding it with dull indifference. She went with him to the door, and lingered there while he addressed the man behind the counter with his airy flourish. It required time for the situation to make itself intelligible. Then the man took the ring extended to him, and looked coldly, not at it, but at Boynton. When the rustic leisure of the establishment had gathered itself about the transaction, he returned it. "I ain't no goldsmith," he said.

"I beg your pardon?" queried Boynton.

The man lifted his voice: "May be it 's gold, and may be it 's brass."

"Brass?"

"Well, you 'd ought to know. Anyhow, I guess we can't trade." The spectators admired a fellow citizen's cool ability to deal with a confidence man.

Boynton turned away with dignity, and addressed a young fellow in the group. "Can you tell me," he said politely, "my shortest way to Ayer Junction? I was brought here by mistaking the downward for the upward train, at that point." The listeners grinned at the shallow imposture, but the young man answered civilly that if he was going to walk he had better take the road to Vardley, keeping due northward on that street. He came to the door to be more explicit, and, throwing it open, discovered Egeria to the others.

"Funny pair of tramps," said one of them, loud enough for the wanderers to hear.

"I guess they ain't any *tramps*," said the storekeeper, darkly.

"Why?" asked the other.

"Well, *I* guess they ain't tramps," repeated the man in authority. His success in coping with Boynton made the rest feel that he had a meaning withheld for the present from regard for the public good; they kept silent; his interlocutor spread out his hands as in an act of submission above the stove. He did not speak again, but after a while another took up the word.

"They say them Shakers at Vardley keeps a house a puppose for lodgin' tramps," he said, holding his knee between his clasped hands, as he sat,

and striking the heel of his boot against the side of the stove.

Another silence followed, while a lounger on the other side of the stove worked his lips for expectoration against the iron; but it was too lukewarm to hiss.

"The old gentleman can put up with 'em, and *keep* his ring, if he steps along pretty spry. 'T ain't more 'n about five mile, is it, Parker?"

After a decent pause, "Well, I don't know what the country 's comin' to," sighed a local pessimist.

"Oh, I guess it 'll all come out right in the end," returned a local optimist. This put the pessimist down; the talk had wandered from horses, at Boynton's appearance, and now it reverted to horses.

The young fellow who had gone to the door with Dr. Boynton did not return within; he walked a little way up the street with him and Egeria, and recollected to warn them about a turning to the right which they were not to take. When he parted with them at a corner, he stood and gazed after them, with perhaps a kindly impulse in his heart fainting through bashfulness and doubt, while they held their way till they drew near the edge of the forest. It looked black and dreadful under the darkened sky; they stopped before reaching it at a little house which stood upon its borders.

"We must ask here," said Egeria desperately.

"Well, you ask, then, my dear," said her father. "They won't deny a woman."

Egeria knocked, and after a long interval the

light from the rear of the house disappeared, and, the door being opened, was held scarily aloft above the head of an elderly woman who surveyed them with an excited face.

Egeria briefly told her story, and ended with a prayer for a night's shelter. "Just let us sit by your fire. We won't trouble you, and in the morning we will go on."

The woman did not change countenance. "You hain't any of them that 's escaped from the reform school?" she demanded, in a high, frightened voice.

Egeria again explained their case. "I don't know where the reform school is. This is my father, and we are honest people!" she added indignantly.

"Well," said the woman, in the same key as before, and clinging to her preconception, "I guess you better go back. The off'cers is sure to catch you."

"Oh, and *won't* you let us in?"

"Why, I could n't, you know, — I could n't. You just keep right along. It 's early yet, and there 's a tavern up this road, — well, it ain't more 'n four mile, if it 's that; you can put up there."

"Is this the road to Vardley?" asked Boynton.

"Yes, yes, — straight along," said the woman, who had been making the aperture between them smaller and smaller; she now finally closed the door with a quick bang, and bolted it.

"What shall we do?" whispered Egeria.

"I don't know," her father faltered, in reply.

"Let us go back to the station," said the girl. "They will let us stay there, and then in the morning we can take the train — Oh, but we haven't any money to pay our way back!" She broke out into a wild sobbing.

"Don't cry, don't cry," said her father, soothingly. "We will walk on. Some one *must* receive us. Or, if not, we can't starve in a single night, and at this season we can't perish of cold." As they resumed their way, something struck lightly in their faces. "Rain?" said Boynton, stretching out his hand.

"No," answered Egeria, "snow."

Neither spoke as they entered the deep shadow of the forest, which in this part of Massachusetts covers miles of country, where the farmer has ceased to coax his wizened crops from the sterile soil and has abandoned it in despair to the wilderness from which his ancestors conquered it.

The road before the wanderers began to whiten. "Oh, when shall we come to a house?" moaned the girl, shrinking closer to her father, and clinging more heavily to his arm.

She started at the sound of voices and the red glare that came from a sheltered hollow of the woods beside the valley into which the road descended. Around a large fire crouched a party of tramps: one held a tilted bottle to his mouth, and another clutched at it; the rest were shouting and singing. As Egeria and her father came into the

range of the firelight, the men saw them. They yelled to them to stop and have a drink. The one who had the bottle snatched up a brand from the fire with his left hand and ran towards them. His foot must have caught in some root or vine; he fell, rolling over his bottle and torch, and while he screamed out that he was burning up, and the rest rushed upon him with laughter for his mishap and curses for the loss of his bottle, Egeria and her father fled into the shadows beyond the light.

Terror gave her force, but when she felt herself safe her strength began to fail.

"I can't go any farther," she said, releasing her hand from her father's arm, and sinking upon the wayside bank. "We will wait here till morning."

He made her no answer, but stood looking up and down the road. "Egeria," he said at last, "I fancy that it 's lighter ahead of us than it is behind, and that we 're near the edge of the woods. Try to come a few steps farther." He lifted her to her feet, and they moved painfully forward. It was as he said: in a little while the woods broke away on either hand, and they stood in the middle of cross-roads; on one corner was a house. But as they drew near the verge of the open, the sound of voices stayed them; they were the voices of young men and young girls laughing and calling to one another, as they issued from this house on the corner. "It 's a school-house," said her father; "they 've had some sort of frolic there."

"Well, you won't get the Unabridged for spell-

ing *merry*, Jim!" shouted one of the youths to another.

"Oh, how does he spell it?" cried one of the girls.

"He spells it M-a-r-y!"

The laugh that followed repeated itself in the woods.

"That's a good joke for hoot-owls!" retorted some one who might be Jim.

"A spelling match," Boynton interpreted.

A noise of joyous screaming and scuffling came from within the house as a light was quenched there, with cries of "I should think you'd be ashamed!" and "Now, you stop!" and the like; and a bevy of young people came scurrying from the door.

"Hello!" shouted one of the young men, "what about the books?"

"I don't know," answered another. "Guess nobody 'll hurt the books before morning."

"I wish they 'd steal mine!" said the gay voice of a girl.

"But the fire, — we 've left a roaring fire."

"Well, let it burn the old thing down."

"All right!"

They hurried forward, shouting to the party ahead, who answered with a medley of derisive noises.

When they were all gone, and their voices had died away, the wanderers crept to the door of the school-house, which they tried anxiously. It opened,

and they entered. A gush of mellow light from the stove door, left open to let the fire die soon, softly illumined the interior. They drew some benches close to the stove, and sank away from the sense of all their misery.

X.

THE last thing of which Egeria had been aware before she fell asleep was her own shadow thrown by the firelight against the school-house door. She thought it was this when she looked again. But the door melted away from around the shadow, and the shadow took feature and expression. Rousing herself with a start, she saw that it was a young girl, cloaked and hooded, standing in the open door-way. The pale, bluish light of a snowy morning filled the school-room. The girl stood still, and looked at Egeria with a stony gaze of fear. The past came back to her; the situation realized itself. Her father, a shabby, disreputable heap of crumpled clothing and tumbled hair, was still asleep; her own beautiful hair had fallen down her shoulder.

"We will go, — we will go," she whispered to the girl in the door-way, with a face as frightened as her own. "It 's my father. We were walking to Vardley; we did n't know where we were, and we found the school-house door unlocked, and we came in." She caught at the wandering coils of her hair, and twisted them into place, and tied on her bonnet.

The girl in the door-way looked as if she would

like to run away, but she came in, gasping, and shut the door behind her. "You 're not tramps?" she made out to ask.

"Oh, no, no, no!" replied Egeria, and she incoherently poured out the story of their misadventure.

The other girl drew a long breath. "And you were going to Vardley Station?"

"Yes."

"That 's more than three miles from here." Egeria did not say anything, but she turned to wake her father. "Oh, don't wake him!" cried the other girl, with a new start of terror, and a partial flight towards the door. "I mean," she added, coming back with a blush, "let him sleep. I — I 'm the teacher; and I 've come to build the fire. You can warm by it before you go. The scholars won't be here yet for an hour." Every word was visibly a conquest from fear, a fulfillment of duty.

The teacher took off her water-proof, the hood of which she had drawn up over her head, and showed herself a short, plain girl, with a homely face full of sense and goodness. Her hair, cut short, clung about her large head in tight rings. She looked at Egeria's ethereal beauty and the masses of her hair, not enviously, but with a kind of compassionate admiration.

The fire had gone down in the stove, and there was still imbedded in the ashes a line of live embers keeping the shape of the original maple stick. She raked the coals forward, laid on some splinters and

bark, and then logs, and closed the door; the fire shouted and roared within.

The teacher sat down on a bench across the stove from Egeria, took into her lap the tin pail she had brought with her, and raised the lid, discovering a smaller pail within, packed round with pieces of mince-pie, doughnuts, and biscuit with slices of cold meat between the buttered halves. She lifted this out, and set it on the stove; she tore some leaves out of a copy-book, and laying them on the iron put the slices of pie on them. She did not say anything to Egeria, who had no authority to interfere with her proceedings. "I'm sorry it is n't coffee," she said, looking into the pail on the stove; "but I can't drink coffee; so it 's only cracked cocoa. Now wake him."

But the stir of garments, the low voices, and the fragrant smell of the cocoa and mince-pie had already roused Boynton. He lifted himself, looked at Egeria, and stared at the teacher, to whom presently he made a courteous bow. She replied by pouring some of the cocoa into a saucer, which she took from the bottom of the larger pail, and handing it to him.

"I beg your pardon?" he said sweetly.

"There 's another saucer," said the teacher evasively; "but you 'll have to eat your pie out of them afterwards."

Her father saw Egeria supplied with cocoa, and then drank with the simple greed of a child.

"This — this lady is the teacher, father," said

Egeria. Boynton, brightened by his draught, bowed again, and the teacher gravely acknowledged his salutation. "I 've told her how we came here."

"Yes, yes," said Boynton; "most disagreeable coincidence. I can assure you that in a somewhat checkered career I have never met with a more painful experience. At times, really I have hardly been able to recognize my own indentity. But it 's well for once, no doubt, to find ourselves in the position in which we have often contemplated others."

The teacher took the pie from the smoking paper and slid a piece into each saucer. "I presume it is n't very wholesome," she said, "but I 've heard that Mr. Emerson says, if you *will* eat it, you 'd best eat it for breakfast, so that you can have the whole day to digest it in."

"Emerson," said the doctor, receiving his saucer with one hand, while he opened his handkerchief and spread it on his knees with the other, "is a very receptive mind. I fancy that there is a social principle in these matters which is n't clearly ascertained yet. Where whole communities eat pie, as ours do, there must be an unconscious coöperative force in its digestion."

The teacher looked at him, but answered nothing.

"I 'm afraid," said Egeria ruefully, "that it 's your dinner."

"The children always want me to eat part of theirs," the teacher explained. "I could n't think of your asking at a house for your breakfast. The

country is overrun with tramps, and they might suppose" — She stopped and blushed, and then she added with rigid self-justice, "Well, I don't know as it was so strange I should."

"No," said Egeria, "you could n't have thought anything else. That 's what they took us for everywhere." She spoke with patience and without bitterness, but she did not eat her breakfast with the hungry relish of the outcast she had been mistaken for.

The teacher sat looking at them, and a new sense of their forlornness seemed to flash upon her. "Why, you have no outside things!"

"No," said Egeria; "they all went off on the train we lost."

The teacher said, like one thinking aloud, "If you are not telling me the truth about yourselves, it will be your loss, and not mine." Then she added, "I don't want you should try to walk to Ayer; it would kill you, in this snow. You must take the cars at Vardley Station." She drew out her purse. "There," she said, handing Egeria some bits of scrip, "it 's ten cents apiece to the Junction; and here," she continued, thriftily putting the biscuit together in a scrap of paper, "is something for your lunch on the cars."

Egeria made no reply. From time to time she had lapsed from all apparent sense of what was going on. She now looked blankly at the teacher.

Her father was not so helpless. "My dear young lady," he exclaimed, "you are perfectly right in

your estimate of the consequences and penalties! If we were deceiving you, we should be the sufferers, and not you. There is a law in these things which no individual will can abrogate. In the end, truth and good always triumph." He had finished his pie, and he now took a draught of cocoa. "Have you many pupils?" he asked.

"No," replied the teacher, "not many. The old people say there used to be forty or fifty, but now there are only sixteen."

Boynton shook his head. "Yes, it is this universal tendency to the cities and the large towns which is ruining us. Well, Egeria, shall we be going?" He had eaten and drunken to his apparent refreshment, and he was now ready to push on.

Egeria cast a look out of the window, and rose languidly.

"I 'd ask you to stay," said the teacher, taking note of her weariness, "but the children will be coming very soon, and" —

"Oh, no, no! we could n't stay. We must go."

The teacher took down her water-proof from the peg on which she had hung it, and, eying it a moment thoughtfully, handed it to Egeria. "I want you should wear this. You 'll take your death if you go out that way. You can give it to the depot man at Vardley Station, and tell him it 's Miss Thorn's. He 'll send it back by the stage this afternoon, and I 'll get it in plenty of time." Egeria did not reply, but stood looking at the teacher with a jaded and wondering regard.

"I will take it for her, Miss Thorn," said the doctor, advancing with a sprightly air, and receiving the cloak. "I will see that it is duly returned. And let me thank you," he added, "for your kindness at a time when, really, we should have been embarrassed without it. My name is Boynton, — Dr. Boynton. Though you can scarcely have heard of it."

"No," said the teacher, reluctantly, but firmly.

"Ah!" returned the doctor. But he did not attempt to enlighten her ignorance. He said, "Come, Egeria," and led the way to the door. The girl turned and looked vaguely at the teacher; but no words of farewell or of thanks passed between them.

The doctor issued cheerfully, even gayly, from the school-house door. The wind had changed, and was blowing from the south. Whiffs of white cloud were sailing far overhead in the vast expanse of blue, from which poured a mellow sunshine. The snow, translucent in the light, and dark blue in the shadow, clung lazily to the trees and the eaves, from which at times the breeze detached it, and tossed it away in soft, large clots. Some unseen crows made themselves heard in the distance; near by, on the fence, a little bird stooped and sang.

"A bluebird!" cried Boynton.

"Yes," answered the teacher; "there were a good many yesterday, before the weather changed. Robins, too."

He made her an airy bow, and Egeria looked back at her over her shoulder as they walked out into the road. "Why, the snow-plow has gone by!" he exclaimed, with simple delight in the effect, and the teacher saw him stop and point out to Egeria the drift, massively broken, and flung on either side in moist blocks by the plow. She watched them from the school-house door-way till a turn of the road hid them from sight. Then she went within, and cast a doubtful glance at the peg where her water-proof had hung. But her face changed as her eye fell to the staunch and capacious rubber-boots standing in order below the peg. "I don't believe that girl had the sign of a rubber!" she mused aloud, in the excess of her compassion.

XI.

THE adventure of the day before and the exercise of their night-walk, with the good breakfast he had eaten, seemed to have brightened Boynton past recollection of all the sorrows he had known. He went forward, discoursing hopefully, and developing a plan he had for leaving Egeria with her grandfather, and returning to this region in order to look up the Shaker community, with which he intended to unite for the purpose of spiritual investigation on the true basis. For some time he did not observe that she responded more languidly and indifferently than her wont; then he asked abruptly, "What is the matter, Egeria?"

"I don't know. Nothing. I am not very well."

"You ought to be, in such air as this. Let me see." He caught up her wrist. "Rather a quick pulse; it may be the walking. Are you hot?"

"My feet are cold, — they 're wet."

He looked down at her shoes, and shook his head in a perplexed fashion. "We must stop somewhere and dry your feet."

"They would n't let us," said Egeria, in a dull way.

"We will stop at that tavern. Perhaps we can

get a lift there with some one going to the station." He took her hand under his arm, and helped her on. She did not complain, nor did she show any increasing weariness.

They had been passing through a long reach of woodland that stretched away on either side of the road, when they came to a wide, open plateau, high and bare. It looked old, and like a place where there had once been houses, though none were now in sight; from time to time, in fact, the ruinous traces of former habitations showed themselves by the wayside. A black fringe of pines and hemlocks bordered the plain where it softly rounded away to the eastward; a vast forest of oak and chestnut formed its western boundary. At its highest point they came in sight of a house on its northern slope, a large, square mansion of brick; an enormous elm almost swept the ground with its boughs, on its eastern side; before it stood an old-fashioned sign-post, and westward, almost in the edge of the forest, lay its stabling.

"That must be the tavern," said Boynton, instinctively making haste towards it. As they drew near, they saw a light buggy standing at the door, and a man who seemed to unite the offices of host and ostler holding the horse by the head. He turned from smoothing the animal's nose, and called to some one within, "Come, hurry up, in there!" A red-faced man, in the faded and misshapen clothes which American manufacture and the clothing store supply to our poor country-folks,

issued from the door, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand, and slouched away down the road. Then a girl, dressed in extreme fashion, of the sort that never convinces of elegance, nor ever mistakes itself for it, with her large hands cased in white gloves, came out and waited to be helped into the buggy. The thick, hard bloom on her somewhat sunken cheeks was incomparably artificial, till the dyed mustache of the man following her showed itself; this was of a purple so bold that if his hair had been purple too, and not of a light sandy color, it could not have looked falser. They had a little squabble, half jocose, which the man at the horse's head admired, before he lifted her to the seat. The landlord handed him the reins.

"Well, give us another call, Bob," he said.

The other looked at him over his dyed mustache without answering, while the girl stared round with her wild black eyes, as if startled at finding herself perched so high up in the light of day. Both at the same time caught sight of Boynton and Egeria, who fell behind her father as he approached the doorway. The man leaned toward the girl and whispered something to her, at which she gave him a push and bade him stop his fooling.

"Can I get a conveyance here to carry us to Vardley Village?" asked Boynton, accosting the landlord.

"I don't know," answered the man, looking doubtfully at the doctor and Egeria. He turned his back on them in the manner of some rustics

who wish to show a sovereign indifference, and made a pace or two towards the door, before he half faced them again.

"Well, good-by, Tommy!" said the man in the buggy, drawing his reins, and then checking his horse. "Look here, will you?"

The landlord went back, and the man leaned over the side of the buggy and said something in a low tone.

"No!" cried the landlord.

"Bet you anything on it!" said the man. "Get up!" He drove away.

"Come in," said the landlord to the doctor, "and I'll see."

Egeria shrunk from following her father, who was mechanically obeying, and murmured something about walking.

"Oh, come in, come in!" said the landlord, more eagerly. "I guess I can manage for you. Come in and rest ye, any way."

"Come, Egeria," said her father.

The landlord was a short, stout man, with a shock of iron-gray hair and a face of dusky red, coarse and harsh; his blood-shot eyes wandered curiously over Egeria's figure. He led the way into the parlor of the tavern, which within had an air of former dignity, as if it had not been built for its present uses. The hall was wide and the staircase fine; the chimney-piece and wooden cornice of the parlor showed the nice and patient carpentry of seventy-five years ago. There was a fire in the

sheet-iron stove on the hearth, and the lady who had just driven off in the buggy had left proof of a decided taste in perfumes. If Egeria had liked she might have dressed her hair at the glass in which this person had surveyed the effect of her paint, with the public comb and brush on the table before it. There were some claret-colored sporting prints on the wall, and some tattered, thumb-worn illustrated papers on the centre-table.

"I 'll tell ye what," said the landlord, who had briefly disappeared after showing them into this room, and had now returned, "I hain't got any hoss in now, but I 'll have one in in about an hour, and then I 'll set ye over to Vardley."

"What will you charge?" asked the doctor.

"It ain't a-goin' to cost ye much. I d' know as I 'll ask ye anything. I 'm goin' there, any way; and I guess we can ride three on a seat."

Boynton expressed a flowery sense of this goodness, but said that they should insist upon paying him for his trouble. Egeria had dropped into the rocking-chair beside the window, and, propping her arm on the window-sill, supported her averted face on her hand. Her head throbbed, and the thick, foul sweetness of the air made her faint; the glare of the sun from the snow and gathering pools beat into her heavy eyes.

"Does your head ache?" asked her father.

"Yes," she gasped.

"I 'll send in some tea," said the landlord.

A black man brought it; there seemed to be no women about the house.

The landlord went and came often ; through her pain and lethargy, the girl had a dull sense of his vigilance. Her father found her feverish, and no better for the tea she drank. He fretted and repined at her condition, and then he grew tired of looking at her pale face fallen against the chair back, and her closed eyes, that trembled under their lids, and now and then sent out a gush of hot tears. He went into the other room, where the landlord sat with his boots on the low, cast-iron stove, and a white-nosed bull-dog slept suspiciously in a corner. As the time passed, different people appeared within and without the tavern. A man in a blood-stained over-shirt drove a butcher's wagon to the door; a tall man, in a silk hat, came with a fish cart painted black and varnished. With a blithe jingle of bells, a young fellow rattled up with a cracker wagon, and having come in for the landlord's order — the landlord did not find it necessary to take down his feet from the stove, or to disturb the angle at which his hat rested on his head, during the transaction — he danced a figure on the painted floor, and caressed the bull-dog with the toe of his boot. "Next time you put up Pete," he said, "I want to bring my brother's brindle. I want *him* to wear the belt a spell. Pete must be gittin' tired of it. Well, I would n't ever said a dog-fight could be such fun," he added, with an expression of agreeable reminiscence. "And the old ball-room 's just the place for it." He spat on the stove, and taking under his arm the empty cracker box, which he had just re-

placed on its shelf with a full one, he went out as he had come in, without saluting the landlord. He stopped at the open door of the parlor, and catching sight of Egeria made her a bow of burlesque devotion, and turned to include the landlord in the fun with a parting wink.

Egeria had not seen him; her eyes were closed; and her father, where he sat in the office, was looking impatiently out of the window. The sky had begun to thicken again.

"Do you think it 's going to rain?" he asked, when the cracker wagon had jingled away.

"Should n't wonder," said the landlord.

"I hope your conveyance will be here soon," pursued the doctor. "I 'm anxious, on my daughter's account, not to miss the train from Vardley that connects with the Portland express."

"Daughter, eh?" said the landlord, with a certain intonation; but Dr. Boynton observed nothing strange in it.

"How soon do you think your horse will be here?" he asked.

"I can't tell ye," said the landlord doggedly.

"You *did* tell me," retorted Boynton, "that it would be here in less than an hour. You have detained us that time already, and now you say you don't know how much longer I must wait."

"Now, look here," began the other, taking down his feet from the stove.

"I wish to pay you for what accommodation we have had. I wish to go," said the doctor, angrily.

"I don't want ye should go!" replied the other, with a stupid air of secrecy.

"I 've nothing to do with that," said the doctor. "I am going. Here is the money for your tea." He flung upon the counter the pieces of scrip which the school-teacher had given him.

The landlord rose to his feet. "Ye can't go. I might as well have it out first as last. Ye can't go."

"Can't go? You 're ridiculous!" Boynton exclaimed. "What 's the reason I can't go?"

"Well, you can go, but the girl can't, — not till the off'cers comes. I mean to say," he added, at Dr. Boynton's look of amaze, "that she 's no more your daughter than she is mine. I d' know where you picked her up, but she 's one of the girls that 's escaped from the reform school, and she 's goin' back there as soon as the off'cers gets here. That 's what 's the matter."

"And do you mean to say that you are going to detain us here against our will?"

"I don't know what you call it. I 'm going to keep you here." He had planted his burly bulk in the door-way leading into the hall.

"Stand aside," said Boynton, "or I 'll take you by the throat."

"I guess not," returned the landlord coolly. "Pete!" The brute in the corner had opened his whitish, cruel eyes at the sound of angry voices. "Watch him!" The dog came and lay down at his master's feet, with his face turned toward Boynton. "There! I guess you won't take anybody by

the throat *much!*" The man resumed his chair, which he tilted back against the counter at its former comfortable angle.

Boynton quivered with helpless indignation. "Is it possible," he exclaimed, "that an outrage like this can be perpetrated at high noon in the heart of Massachusetts?"

"That 's about the size of it," returned the landlord, with a grin of brutal exultation.

"I must submit," said the doctor. "But you shall answer for this." The man was silent, and the doctor fancied that he might perhaps be relenting. He poured out a recital of the whole misadventure that had ended in their coming to his door, and appealed to him not to detain them. "My daughter has been sick, and she is now far from well. I am most anxious to pursue our journey. We have no friends in this region, and we are out of money. Let us go, now, and I will consent to overlook this outrageous attempt upon our liberty. If we lose the train this afternoon, she may suffer very seriously from the delay and the disappointment."

"She 'll be all right when she gets back to the reform school," answered the landlord, as if bored by the long story.

Boynton's self-command failed him. He burst into tears. "My God!" he sobbed, "have I fallen so low as this? — impostor, and tramp, and beggar, and now the captive, the slave, of this ruffian! It 's too much! What have I done, — what have I

done!" He hid his face in his hands, and bowed himself abjectly forward in the chair into which he had sunk.

Some one drove up to the door, and shouted from the outside, "Hello!"

The landlord rose, and saying to his dog, "Stay there," went out to the door, and after a brief parley came in again with two other men. Their steps sounded as if they went to the door of the parlor and looked in, while their voices sank to rapid whispers. In his agony of anxiety, Boynton made an involuntary movement forwards; the dog growled and crept nearer. He was helpless; but the steps returned to the outer door, and there a voice said, "No, I don't want to see *him*, as long as 't ain't the girl. Somebody 's made a dumn fool of *you*, Harris, and you 've made dumn fools of *us*. Guess you better wait a while, next time."

The landlord came sulkily back, and sat down in his chair, which he tilted against the counter as before. Boynton suffered some time to elapse before he asked, "Well, sir, do you mean to let us go?"

"Who 's henderin' you?" sullenly demanded the landlord, without moving.

"Then call away your dog."

The landlord refused, out of mere brutish wantonness, to comply at once; but he presently did so, and followed Boynton to the parlor. Then, according to Boynton's report, ensued a series of those events of which the believers in such mysteries fiercely assert the reality, and of which others as

strenuously deny the occurrence. The sky darkened; there was a noise like the straining of the branches of the elms beside the house; but there was no wind, and the boughs were motionless. Presently this straining sound, as if the fibres were twisting and writhing together, was heard in the wood-work of the room.

"What the hell is that?" cried the landlord. The room was full of it, whatever it was; every part of the wood-work — doors, window casings, cornice, wainscot — was now voluble with a muffled detonation.

"Wait!" Boynton answered. The sound beat like rain-drops on the floor, at which the landlord stared, with the dog whimpering at his heels. Egeria lay white and still in the rocking-chair by the window. At the sound of their voices she stirred and moaned; then, as Boynton asserted, they saw the marble top of the centre-table lifted three times from its place; a picture swung out from the wall, as if blown by a strong gust; and the brush from the table was flung across the room, flying close to the dog's head; with a howl, he fled out-of-doors.

"For God's sake, man, what is it?" gasped the landlord, seizing Boynton's arm, and cowering close to him.

"I forgive you, I bless you!" cried the other, rapturously. "It was from your evil that this good came. It 's a miracle; it 's — it 's the presence of the dead."

"No, no!" protested the landlord. "I 've kept

a hard place; there 's been drinkin' and fancy folks; but there hain't been no murder, — not in *my* time. I can't answer for it before that; they always tell about killin' peddlers in these old houses. Oh! Lord have mercy!" A flash of red light filled the world, and a rending burst of thunder made the house shake. The electricity appeared to rise from the ground, and not to come from the clouds; it was, as sometimes happens, a sole discharge. The landlord turned, and followed his dog out-of-doors. The negro was already there, looking up at the house.

Egeria started from her chair. "Did you will it, father, — did you will it?" she implored, at sight of Dr. Boynton's wild face.

"No; it has come without motion of mine," he answered with a solemn joy. "I have never seen or heard anything like it." He looked round the room, in which an absolute silence now prevailed.

The girl shuddered. "I have had a horrible dream. The house seemed full of drunken men — and women — like that girl in the buggy; and we could n't get away, and you could n't get to me, and — oh!" She shook violently, and hurried on her hat and water-proof. "Come! I can't breathe here."

As they passed out the landlord made no motion to detain them; he even shrank a few paces aside. When Boynton looked back from the next turn of the road, he saw him walking to and fro before the tavern, looking up now and then at its front, and

taking unconsciously the cold rain that lashed his own face as he turned eastward again. He was in a frame of high exultation; he shouted in talk with Egeria, who scarcely answered, as she pressed forward with her head down.

The snow dissolved under the rain and flooded the road, in which they waded, plunging on and on. They came presently to a lonely country graveyard, where the soaked pines and spruces dripped upon the stones, standing white and stiffly upright where they were of recent date, and where darkened with the storms of many seasons slanting in various degrees of obliquity to a fall. Here was one of those terrible little houses in which the hearse, the bier, and the sexton's tools are kept; Boynton tried the door, and when it yielded to his battering he called to his daughter to take shelter with him there.

"No!" she shouted back to him, "I would rather die!" She pushed, she knew not whither, down the road that wound into a stretch of pine forest, and he must needs follow her. At last they came to a hollow through which a brook, swollen by the snow and rain, rolled a yellow torrent. They stopped at the brink in despair; there was no house in sight, but on a knoll near by the trees stood so thick that the rain-fall was broken by the densely interwoven boughs.

The doctor led Egeria to this shelter, and placed her in the dryest spot; he felt her shiver, and heard her teeth chatter, as the waves of cold swept over

her. He left her fallen on the brown needles, and went and tried the depth of the stream with a stick; the rain dripped from him everywhere, — from his elbows, from the rim of his silk hat, and from the point of his nose; he looked at once weird and grotesque.

"Heh!" cried a loud voice behind him. In a covered wagon crouched the figure of a young man in manifold capes and wraps of drab and blue, under the sweep of a very wide-brimmed hat. He had almost driven over Boynton. "Tryin' for water, with a hazel-rod? Guess you 'll find it most anywheres to-day."

The voice was pleasant, and Boynton, looking up, confronted a cheery face in the wagon. "I was seeing if it was too deep to cross."

"'T ain't for the horses," said their driver. "Get in." He moved hospitably to one side. "You can't make me any wetter."

"Thank you," said Boynton. "I have my daughter here under the pines."

"Your daughter?" The young man in the wagon looked at first puzzled, and then, as he craned his neck round the side of the curtain and saw the little cowering heap which was Egeria, he looked daunted, but he only said, "Bring her, too."

Boynton gathered her into his arms, and placed her on the seat between him and the driver. "We were going to Vardley Station," he explained. "Is this the way?"

"It 's *one* way," said the other, driving through the torrent. "But I guess you better stop with us till the rain 's over. We 'll be home in half a mile."

"You are very good," said Boynton, looking at him. "We must push on. We must get back to the Junction in time for the Portland express." He once more gave the facts of their mischance.

When he had ended, "Oh, yee," said the other; "you are the friend that was speakin' to some of our folks at the Junction."

The doctor started. "Your folks? What are you?"

"Shakers."

"Egeria! Egeria!" shouted her father. "I have found them! This gentleman is a Shaker! He is taking us to the community! I accept, sir, with great pleasure. I shall be glad to stop and see more of your people. Egeria!" She made no answer. Her limp and sunken figure rested heavily against the young Shaker; her head had fallen on his shoulder.

"*I* guess she 's fainted," he said.

XII.

EGERIA had not fainted, but she had lapsed into a torpor from which she could not rouse herself. She could not speak or make any sign when her father drew her head away from the young man's shoulder and laid it on his own. The Shaker chirped his reeking horses into a livelier pace, and when he reached the office in the village he sprang from the wagon with more alertness than could have been imagined of him, and ran in-doors to announce his guests.

Brother Humphrey and the three office sisters,[1] very clean and very dry, with the warm smell of a stove fire exhaling from their comfortable garments, received him with countenances in which resignation blended with the natural reluctance of people within to have anything to do with people without, in such weather.

"Oh, better put them in the tramps' house," said Brother Humphrey, — "there 's a fire there."

[1] In placing some passages of his story among the Shakers of an easily recognizable locality, the author has avoided the study of personal traits, and he wishes explicitly to state that his Shakers are imaginary in everything but their truth, charity, and purity of life, and that scarcely less lovable quaintness to which no realism could do perfect justice.

"Yee," consented one of the sisters, "they will do very well there."

"They would slop everything up here," said another, "and we've just been over our floors, Laban."

The third was silent, but she wrung her hands in nervous anxiety, like one who would not be selfish, and yet would like whatever advantage may come of selfishness.

"Nay," said Laban, "they're not tramps. They're the folks that Joseph and Elihu told about meetin' yesterday. I don't know as you'd ought to put them with the tramps. I guess the young woman's in a faint."

"Oh, why didn't you say so, to begin with, Laban?" lamented that one of the sisters who had not yet spoken. "Of course she's sick, and here we've been standin' and troublin' about our clean floors, and lettin' her suffer. I don't see how I can bear it."

"Oh, you'll be over it by fall, Frances," answered Laban, jocosely. Humphrey caught up a cotton umbrella, vast enough for community use, and weather-worn to a Shaker drab, and sallied out to the gate. The doctor and Laban got their benumbed burden from the wagon between them, and carried Egeria into the house, where they were met with remorseful welcome by the sisters. They dispatched Brother Humphrey to kindle a fire in the stove of the upper chamber, reserved for guests, and into its sweet, fresh cleanliness Frances pres-

ently helped Egeria, and then helped her into bed, while the others went to make her a cup of tea.

Her father, meanwhile, had taken off his wet clothes, and arrayed himself in a suit belonging to one of the brethren, a much taller and a thinner man than Boynton, who made a Shaker of novel and striking pattern in his dress. But he beheld his appearance in the glass, which meagrely ministered to the vanity of the office guests, with uncommon content, as a token that he had already entered upon a new and final stage of investigation; and when his tongue had been loosed by the cup of tea brought to him in the office parlor, he regarded his surroundings with as great satisfaction. This room was carpeted, but it was like the rest of the house in its simple white walls and its plain finish of wood painted a warm brown; there were braided rugs scattered about before the stove and the large chairs, as there were at the foot of the stair-ways, and at the bedsides in the chambers above. Dr. Boynton, stirring his tea, walked out into the low, long hall, bare but not cheerless, and traversed it to look into the room on the other side; then he returned to the parlor, and glanced at the books and pamphlets on the table, — historical and doctrinal works relating to Shakerism, periodicals devoted to various social and hygienic reforms, and controversial tracts upon points in dispute between the community and the world; there were several weekly newspapers, and Boynton was turning over one of them with the hand that had momentarily

relinquished his teaspoon when Brother Humphrey rejoined him.

"If we could have at all helped ourselves," he began promptly, "I should consider our intrusion upon you most unwarrantable; but we had no will in the matter."

"Nay," replied the Shaker, "it's no intrusion. This is not a family house. We call it the Office, for we do our business and receive friends from the world outside here."

"Do you mean that you keep a house of entertainment?"

"Our rule forbids us to turn any one away. Of late years, the wayfaring poor have increased so much that we have appointed a small house especially for them; but we cannot put everybody there."

"I thank you," said Boynton.

"It is not a hotel," continued Humphrey, "for we make out no bills. All are welcome to what we can do; those who can pay may pay."

"I shall wish to pay, as soon as we can recover our effects," Boynton interposed.

"Nay, I did not mean that," quietly rejoined the Shaker. "You are welcome, whether you pay or not."

Boynton turned from these civilities. "I am glad to find myself here. I met two of your number yesterday, and had some conversation with them on a subject that vitally interests me."

"Yee, I heard," said the Shaker. "You are spiritualists. Are you the medium?"

"My daughter is a medium, — a medium of extraordinary powers, which I dare not say I have developed, but to which I have humbly ministered; powers that within the last hour have received testimony of the most impressive and final nature." Brother Humphrey made no outward sign of any inward movement that Boynton's words might have produced, and the latter suddenly demanded, "Are you a spiritualist?"

"Yee," answered the Shaker, "we are all spiritualists."

"Then you will be interested — you will all be interested intensely — in the communication which I shall have to make to your community. I wish you to call a meeting of your people, before whom I desire to lay some facts of the most astounding character, and to whom I wish to propose myself for admission to your community, in order to the pursuance of investigations profoundly interesting to the race."

He paused, full of repressed excitement; but Brother Humphrey was not moved. "There will be a family meeting to-morrow night," he began.

"To-morrow night!" cried Boynton. "Is it possible that you are so indifferent to phenomena that ought to be instantly telegraphed from Maine to California? That" —

"We have heard a good deal of the doings with the spirits in the world outside," interrupted the Shaker, in his turn, "and we know how often folks are deceived in them and in themselves. If

something new and important has happened to you, I guess it 'll keep for twenty-four hours." Brother Humphrey smiled quaintly, and seemed to expect his guest to take this common-sense view of the matter.

"Oh, it will keep!" exclaimed the doctor. "But so would the thunder from Sinai have kept!" He plunged into a vivid and rapid narration of the events of his captivity and release at the tavern.

When he paused, the Shaker replied with unperturbed calm: "These are things to be judged of by the family. I cannot say anything about them."

"Is it possible?" demanded Boynton, in a tone of indescribable disappointment. He seemed hurt and puzzled. After a while he said, "I submit. Could you let me have writing materials to take to my room? I wish to make some notes."

"Yee," said Humphrey.

Boynton went to his room, which was across a passage-way from that where one of the sisters was still busy with Egeria, and he did not reappear till dinner, which was served him in the basement of the office, in a dining-room made snug with a stove-fire. As Boynton unfolded his napkin, "What are your tenets?" he abruptly demanded of the sister who came to wait upon him.

"Tenets?" faltered Rebecca.

"Your doctrine, your religious creed."

"We have no creed," replied the sister.

"Well, then, you have a life. What is your life?"

"We try to live the angelic life," said Rebecca, with some embarrassment: "to do as we would be done by; to return good for evil; to put down selfishness in our hearts."

"Good, very good! There could be no better basis. But as a society, a community, what is your central idea?"

"I don't know. We neither marry nor give in marriage."

"Yes, yes! That is what I thought. That was my impression. I fully approve of your system. It is the only foundation on which a community can rest. And to keep up your numbers you depend upon converts from the world?"

"Yee."

"But you bring up children whom you adopt?"

"Yee."

"Do they remain with you?"

"We have better luck with those who are gathered in after middle life. The young folks — we are apt to lose them," said the Shakeress, a little sadly.

"I see, I see!" returned Boynton. "You cannot fight nature unassisted by experience. Life must teach them something first. They fall in love with each other?"

"They are apt to get foolish," the sister assented. "And then they run off together. That is what hurts us. They no need to. If they would come and tell us" —

Boynton shook his head. "Impossible! But

you have the true principle. Celibacy is the only hope of communism, — of advanced truth." He ceased to question her as abruptly as he began; but after he had dispatched his dinner, he asked leave to borrow from the parlor a work on Shakerism which he had noticed there, and he again shut himself up in his room. That evening they heard him restlessly walking the floor.

The sister who visited Egeria last had stood a moment, shading her lamp with her hand and looking down on the girl's beauty. Her yellow hair strayed loosely out over the pillow; her lips were red and her cheeks flushed. The sister's tresses had been shorn away as for the grave thirty years before, and her face had that unearthly pallor which the Shaker sisters share with nuns of all orders. She stooped and kissed Egeria's hot cheek, and then went down to the office sitting-room to report her impressions to the other sisters before they slept.

"It appears as if her father did n't want to go to bed," said Sister Diantha, after a moment's quiet, in which the doctor's regular tread on the floor overhead made itself audible.

"If he 's got anything on his mind," said Sister Rebecca, "it ain't his daughter."

"Yee, Rebecca," said Sister Frances, "you 're right, there. I told him I thought she was going to have a fit of sickness, but he said it wa'n't anything but exhaustion, and 't he 'd see after her; 't he was a doctor himself. To my knowledge he

hain't been near her since. *I* think she 's goin' to have a fit of sickness."

Brother Humphrey came in from the next room and stood by the stove. "How did you leave her, Frances?" he asked.

"Well, *I* think she 's goin' to have a fit of sickness," repeated Frances.

"Well, I don't know 's you 'd have much to say agin that, would you?" returned the brother, after a general pause. "You hain't had a good fit of sickness on hand for quite a spell."

The other sisters laughed. "Set down, Humphrey," said Diantha, putting him a chair. The manner of these elderly women with Humphrey was of a truly affectionate and sisterly simplicity, to which he responded with brotherly frankness.

"*I* guess she ain't goin' to be very sick," resumed Humphrey, making himself easy in his chair. "Any way, we 've got a doctor to prescribe for her."

"What *do* you think of him, Humphrey?" asked Rebecca.

"Pretty glib," said Humphrey.

"I don't know as I ever heard better language," suggested Frances.

"Oh, his *language* is good enough," said Humphrey.

"It 's quite a convert Laban 's brought us," observed Diantha. "Talk of winter Shakers!" she continued, referring to that frequent sort of convert whose Shakerism begins and ends with cold weather.

"I hain't seen any one so ready to be gathered in for a long time."

"Yee, too ready," said Humphrey, soberly. "That kind ain't apt to stay gathered in; and I 'm about tired havin' the family fill mouths for a month or two, and afterwards revilin's proceed out of 'em."

"We must receive all, and try all," interposed Frances, gently.

"Yee," sighed Humphrey.

"What do you say to his story?" asked Diantha.

"I don't judge it," said the brother. "We know that spirits do communicate with men, and miracles happen every day. As to the doin's at the Elm Tahvern, Harris might tell a different story."

"I should n't believe any story Harris told," said Frances.

Humphrey smiled. "Well, I don't know as *I* should, come to look at it," he admitted.

"I wish that nest could be broken up," said Rebecca. "It 's a cross."

"Yee, it 's a cross," answered Humphrey. "I most drove over a man, dead drunk, in the road yesterday, comin' down into the woods, after I passed the tahvern; and nearly all the tramps that come now smell of rum. The off'cers don't seem to do anything."

"Oh, the off'cers!" cried Diantha.

The walking had continued regularly overhead; but now, after some hesitation, the steps approached

the door, which was heard to open, and they crossed the hall to Egeria's room. From thence, after a brief interval, they descended the stairs, and Dr. Boynton, lamp in hand, entered the room. The sisters rose in expectation.

"I find my daughter in a fever," said Boynton, with an absent air. "What medicines have you in the house?"

"We have our herbs," answered Sister Frances.

"They may be the best thing," said Boynton, with the same abstraction, as if he were thinking of something else at the same time. He stood and waited amid a general silence, till Sister Frances, who had gone out, reappeared with some neat packages of the medicinal herbs which the Shakers put up. He chose one, and asked for some water in a tin dish in which to steep it on the stove.

"Let me do it for you," pleaded Sister Frances. The other sisters joined in an entreaty to be allowed to sit up with the sick girl.

"No," said Boynton. "I have always taken care of her, and to-night at least I will watch with her. I could n't sleep if I went to bed, but I shall make myself easy in an arm-chair, if you 'll give me one." Humphrey went to fetch the chair, and as he passed the door, on his way up-stairs with it, Boynton called out to him, "Thanks! If her fever increases," he continued to the sisters, "she will wake at eleven, and then I shall give her this. I shall need nothing more. Good-night."

He went out, and Sister Frances said, with per-

haps some sense of penalty in this loss of opportunity for nursing the girl through the night, "I feel to say that I was hasty in judgin' on him."

"Yee," said the others. "We judged him hastily."

"We were too swift to blame," said Humphrey, who now returned. "Let us remember it the next time."

"But," added Sister Frances, "I *knew* she was goin' to have a fit of sickness."

The sisters took each a kerosene hand-lamp, and passed up the bare, clean halls to their chambers. The brother went about trying the fastenings of the windows and the locks of the outer doors. The time had been, before the time of tramps, when he never turned a key at night.

In the morning Sister Frances made an early visit to Egeria's room, and found the girl and her father both awake. She was without fever now, but she lay white and still in her bed, and her father stood looking at her unhopefully.

Sister Frances went down to the kitchen, where the other sisters were already busy getting Boynton's breakfast. "It 's goin' to be a fit of sickness," she said.

"Then she had best go to the sick-house," said Diantha.

"Yee," added Rebecca, at a look of protest from Frances, "that 's what it 's for, and she can be better done for there. It 's noisy here."

She urged that it was noisy when they spoke,

later, of Egeria's removal to Boynton, who owned that he could not now say she would not be sick: it was the belief of the office sisters that they lived in the midst of excitement.

The day had broken clear, and the New England spring was showing herself in one of her moods of conscientious adherence to duty: she would perform her part with sunshine and birds, but she breathed cold across the brilliant landscape, and she warned vegetation that it started at its own risk. The Shaker village had awakened to its round of labors and self-denials as quietly as if it had not awakened at all. Some of the elderly men, with the boys and the hired hands, were at work with the cattle in the great barns; some were raking together the last year's decay in the garden into heaps for burning; some were busy in the workshops. The women went about their wonted cares in-doors, and there was no sign of interest in the arrival of guests at the office. Perhaps their presence had not been generally talked over in the family, but had been held in reserve for formal discussion at the meeting in the evening. The office sisters consulted with the eldress in the family house opposite in reference to Egeria's removal, and the infirmary was made ready for her. It was aired, the damp was driven out by a hot fire in the stove, and Sister Frances strove to set its order still more in order; a little fluff under the bed or a spot upon the floor would have been a comfort to her; but everything was blamelessly, hopelessly neat. It

was not quite regular for her to take an interest in things outside of the office, but she had been suffered to do so much in consideration of her affliction at having a fit of sickness snatched from her care, as it were, and she was allowed a controlling voice in deciding upon the doctor's request to have a bed put up for him in the infirmary. Such a thing was hitherto unknown; it was an invasion of family bounds by the world outside; but it stood to reason that the girl's father had a double claim to be as near to her as possible, and after some conscientious difficulty his request was granted.

While they were making ready for her, Brother Elihu came to see him at the office, and gave him a sort of conditional welcome. He seemed to be a person of weight in the community, and after his brief visit Boynton perceived that his standing was more strictly probationary than before. There was no want of kindness in Elihu's manner; he made several thoughtful suggestions for the welfare and convenience of the Boyntons; but he had shown no eagerness for the statement which the doctor wished to make to the community, nor for his ideas upon the development of spiritistic science. The statement, he said, could be made that evening, or at the next family meeting; it did not matter; there was no haste. "Spiritualism arose among us; our faith is based upon the fact of an uninterrupted revelation; the very songs we sing in our meetings were communicated to us, words and music, from the other world. We have seen much

perversion of spiritualism in the world outside,—much error, much folly, much filth. If you have new light, it will not suddenly be quenched. Rest here a while. Our first care must be for the young woman."

"Yes, yes!" assented Boynton restively.

The office brothers and sisters had listened to Elihu with evident abeyance; only Sister Frances, by looks and tones, expressed herself unchanged to Boynton. As the time drew on toward evening, and Egeria seemed to need constant watchfulness, she offered to take his place at the infirmary, and to let him know if he was needed at any time during the meeting. This made it easy for him to go, and Sister Frances established herself in attendance upon the sick girl. She was not afterwards dislodged from her place in the infirmary. There were nurses whose duty it was to care for the sick, but Frances clung to her patient, not in defiance, but in a soft, elastic tenderness which served her as well.

Dr. Boynton went to the family meeting, and remained profoundly attentive to the services with which the speaking was preceded. He saw the sisters seated on one side of the large meeting-room, and the brothers on the other, with broad napkins half unfolded across their knees, on which they softly beat time, with rising and falling palms, as they sang. The sisters, young and old, all looked of the same age, with their throats strictly hid by the collars that came to their chins, and their close-

cropped hair covered by stiff wire-framed caps of white gauze; there was greater visible disparity among the brothers, but their heads were mostly gray, though a few were still dark with youth or middle life; on either side there was a bench full of sedate children.

When the singing was ended, the minister read a chapter of the Bible, and one of the elders prayed. Then a sister began a hymn, in which all the family joined. At its close, a young girl rose and described a vision which she had seen the night before in a dream. When she sat down, the elders and eldresses came out into the vacant space between the rows of men and women, and, forming themselves into an ellipse, waved their hands up and down with a slow, rhythmic motion, and rocked back and forth on their feet. Then the others, who had risen with them, followed in a line round this group, with a quick, springing tread, and a like motion of the hands and arms, while they sang together the thrilling march which the others had struck up. They halted at the end of the hymn, and let their arms sink slowly to their sides; a number of them took the places of those in the midst, and the circling dance was resumed, ceasing, and then beginning again, till all had taken part in both centre and periphery; the lamps quivering on the walls, and the elastic floor, laid like that of a ball-room, responding to the tread of the dancers. When they went back to their seats, one woman remained standing, and began to prophesy in tongues.

A solemn silence followed upon her ceasing, and then Brother Elihu rose, and said briefly that a friend from the world outside had a statement to make to the family, in the belief that he had arrived at central truths relating to spiritualism. He claimed to have been operating in a certain direction, with results as striking as they were unexpected. Elihu reminded them that as Shakers they had not been able to maintain a cordial sympathy with spiritualists in the world outside, who had too often abused to love of gain and the gratification of their pride and vanity the principle of spiritual communion originally revealed to Shakers. Yet they could not in reason refuse to hear the statement of this friend, who had, as it were, been providentially cast in their way, and who was apparently not moved by considerations of personal glory and profit, but who, from all he said, had the wish to remand the science into the keeping of Shakers, and to pursue his own investigations under their auspices. Elihu spoke with neatness and point; he added some cautionary phrases against too hasty judgment of the facts about to be offered them, and warned them to beware of self-deception and the illusions arising from love of the marvelous, whether in their own hearts or the hearts of others.

Boynton could scarcely wait for him to have done. "I thank the brother," he said, in rising, "for admonishing us to beware of self-deception; it is an evil which in an inquiry like this would prove fatal, — which *does* prove fatal wherever it

mingles with religious impulse; it poisons, it palsies, religious impulse. I have always guarded against it with anxious care, and, though sometimes abused by the deceit of others, I have at least no cause to accuse myself of want of vigilance concerning my own impressions. I regarded with skeptical scrutiny the first developments of spiritualism. I had been bred in the strictest sect of the Calvinists, from which I had revolted to the opposite extreme of infidelity; I was a materialist, believing in nothing that I could not see, hear, touch, or taste. I rejected the notion of a Supreme Being; I derided the hypothesis of immortality. The interest which I had taken in mesmerism only intensified my contempt for the whole order of miracles, in all ages. I saw the effect of mind upon mind, of mind upon matter; but I saw that it was always the effect of earthly intellect upon earthly substance. I accounted even for the wonders performed by Christ and the Apostles by mesmerism, acting now upon the subjects of their cures and resuscitations, and now upon the imaginations of the spectators.

"When the new phenomena were forced upon my attention by their prevalence in so many widely separated places, under so many widely differing conditions, I began to study them as the effect of mind upon inanimate matter. I did not suffer myself to suppose a spiritual origin for these phenomena, for I would not suppose spirits. I imported into this fresh field of research the strict and hard methods with which I had wrought in the old.

"My wife died during the infancy of the daughter who is here with me now, the involuntary guest of your hospitality, and her death was attended by occurrences of a nature so intangible, so mysterious, so sacred, that I do not know how to shape them in words, but regarding which I may safely appeal to your own spiritual experience. In the moment of her passing I was aware of something, as of an incorporeal presence, a disembodied life, and in that moment I believed! I accepted the heritage which she had bequeathed me with her breath, and I dedicated the child to the study of truth under the new light I had received.

"That child has been my mesmeric subject almost from her birth, and all my endeavors have latterly been to her development as a medium of communication with the other world. She was naturally a child of gay and sunny temperament, loving the sports of children, and fond of simple, earthly pleasures. She showed great aptness for study, — she liked books and school; and the ordinary observer would have pronounced her a hopeless subject for psychological experiment. But I argued that if spirit was truly immortal it was immutable, and that a nature like hers, warm, happy, and loving, would have the same attraction for persons in one world as in another. The event proved that I was not mistaken; from the first, disembodied spirits showed a remarkable affinity for hers, and the demonstrations, though inarticulate and indefinite, were of the most unusual order. They

frightened and disturbed her, and she did all that she could to escape from them. At different times, indeed, she effectually rebelled against my influence; and she was abetted in these periods of revolt by those who, after myself, were nearest and dearest to her. But in the end my influence always triumphed, for she loved me with the tender affection which her mother seemed to impart to her with the gift of her own life. I never appealed to this affection in vain, and I have seen her change from a creature of robust, terrestrial tendencies to a being of moods almost as ethereal as those of the spirits with which it has been my struggle to associate her.

"Her health has not always borne the strain well, and but for my own sustaining strength it must have given way completely. The conditions amidst which we lived were all unfavorable. I will not enter upon the long story of my own misfortunes. By the insidious operation of the prevailing bigotry, public confidence in me was undermined; I lost my practice; I was reduced to dependence upon her kindred, who were the bitterest of my antagonists, and who resisted by every means in their power my purpose of taking her away from them, and attempting her development in other circumstances. But I prevailed, as I always prevailed when I made a final appeal to her affection. We came away, and entered upon the career, distasteful to us both, of public exhibitors. At first we met with great success in the small places which

we visited, and I was induced to try our experiment in Boston. Here, too, we made a good impression; but almost at the outset, we encountered an influence, an enmity, embodied in a certain individual, against which we were almost powerless. To this antagonism was added the paralyzing effect of fraud on the part of a medium who assisted at our principal séance.

"I saw, upon reflection, that we could not hope to succeed in the atmosphere of a mercenary, professional mediumism; and I determined to retire again to our village, and lay once more, however painfully and slowly, the foundations of our experiment. I dreamed of forming about me a community of kindred spirits, in which our work should be done unhindered by the selfish hope of gain, and I armed myself with patience for years of trial and discouragement.

"Brother Elihu will tell you how chance brought us together in the depot at Boston, and again at Ayer Junction; and I will not detain you with the history of the seeming disasters which have ended in our presence among the only people who have conceived of spiritism as a science, and practiced it as a religion. The mistake of a train going southward for a train going northward made us houseless and penniless wanderers; the cruel rapacity of a ruffian crowned our sufferings with a triumph surpassing my wildest hopes."

Dr. Boynton entered upon a circumstantial account of the strange occurrences at the Elm Tav-

ern, and painted every detail with a vividness which had its effect upon his hearers. At the close, one of the sisters struck into a rapturous hymn, in which the others joined. He remained standing while they sang, and when their voices died away he continued in a low and grave tone : —

" What I wish now is simply to be received among you without prejudice, and to be allowed to carry out my plan with the powerful help of your sympathetic and intelligent sphere. I do not ask to be received out of charity : I am a physician, and I offer you my professional services at need ; I have strong arms, and I am willing to work in your shops and your fields. But I feel myself here in presence of the right conditions, and I would make any sacrifice, short of the sacrifice of self-respect, to continue here. I am intensely disappointed that neither my investigations nor my usefulness to you can begin at once. My daughter, as you know, lies sick in your infirmary, and my first, my whole duty is to her. As soon as she is well again, you shall have my labor, and the world shall have my truth."

He sat down. One of the elders rose, and, coming forward, said, " The thanks of the family are due to the friend for what he has spoken. The meeting is dismissed."

The brothers and sisters dispersed to their dwelling-houses, and Boynton walked alone to the infirmary. He found Sister Frances with his daughter, who was wakeful and in a high fever.

XIII.

Her father watched over Egeria in her sickness with the mechanical skillfulness and the mental abstraction which the office sisters had seen in his treatment of her case from the first. He was at her bedside night and day while the danger lasted; he prepared the medicines himself and administered them with his own hand, and he waited their effect from hour to hour, almost from moment to moment, with anxious scrutiny. At the same time a second and more inward self in him remained at immeasurable remoteness. "I never see such doctorin' or such nursin'," said Sister Frances, in her daily report at the office; "but it don't seem, somehow, as if he did it for *her*. I should say — and perhaps I should say more 'n I ought if I *did* say it — 't he wanted her to get well, but 't he did n't want her to get well on her own account; well, not in the first *place*. And still he 's just as kind and good! Well, it 's perplexin'."

"I can't see," said Rebecca, carefully, "as we 've got any call to judge him, as long as he does his duty by her."

"That 's just where it is, Rebecca," answered Frances. "It does seem as if there was somethin'

better than duty in this world. I d' know as there is, nor *what* it is; but it does seem as if there might be."

Boynton's efforts were bent not only to Egeria's escape from danger, but to her immunity from suffering, so far as he could avert it; and to this end he often used his mesmeric power with what appeared good effect. The rending headache yielded to the mystical passes made above her throbbing temples, or over her eyes that trembled with the hot pain; or perhaps it was only the touch of the physician's wise fingers that soothed them, and brought her the deep, strange sleep. But after the crisis of the fever, and when the convalescence began, the influence, whatever it was, ceased to relieve. It fretted instead of strengthening the girl in her climb up toward health, as her father was quick to perceive. He desisted, and he did not talk with her of the schemes and hopes that preoccupied him. He scarcely talked of them at all, though now and then, when he met Elihu, it was clear that he had not relinquished them in the slightest measure. The Shaker wondered at the self-control with which he cast them into such complete abeyance, and could not forbear suggesting at one of their encounters, "Your daughter's sickness is quite a little cross to your patience, Friend Boynton."

"Yes, yes," returned the other, intensely; "but it is not the first time I have had to use patience. The end is worth waiting for, and, as Humphrey

said when we first talked of it, the end can wait for us ; the truth will keep. I am sure of the result. But nothing can be done till she is perfectly well again."

" Yee," said Elihu ; " the young woman's welfare is more precious than any proof she could give us of the existence of spirits. We know that they exist already."

They did not speak of Boynton's union with the family ; that question shared the suspense in which the great problem, to the solution of which Shakerism had been only a means in his mind, was left. But he had taken his place in the community like one of them. There were reasons in the condition of the only suit of clothing which he brought from the world outside why he should continue to dress in the Shaker garb ; but it is probable that he would have preferred to wear it, even if the skill of the family tailoress could have rehabilitated the wreck of his secular raiment ; and he was faithful in his attendance at all the religious meetings, both those held in the family-house and those opened to the public, with the advancing spring, in the meeting-house. He did not take an active part in the worship. Once, when asked to speak, he said briefly that for the present he had nothing to add to his first statement ; and during the marching and singing he sat quietly in a corner, opposite a sister on the women's side, whose extreme stoutness had long excused her from dancing before the Lord. In the mean time he had treated several slight

cases of sickness which occurred in the family; and he had drawn all the teeth in the head of a young sister much tormented with toothache, and long emulous of the immunity enjoyed by most of the other sisters through their full sets of artificial teeth. He had also, in his moments of disoccupation, and during his watches beside Egeria, made a profound study of the history and doctrine of Shakerism; and he grew into general liking with the family at large, whose knowledge of his devotion to his daughter did not search motive so jealously or fantastically as that of Sister Frances, and who thought him a marvel of vigilance and skill.

April had passed, and May had worn away to its last weeks before the girl could sit up in an easy-chair, and with pillowed head look out on the landscape. Sometimes, after the favorable change in her fever began, she had asked, in the mellowing afternoons, to have her window opened to let in the rich, pungent odors of the burning refuse of the gardens, — the last year's withered vines and stalks, which the boys had raked into large piles, and fired in the field below the infirmary. She could hear, from where she lay, the snap and crackle of the flames; and once, when Sister Frances returned after a moment in which she had left the sick girl alone, she found that Egeria had dragged herself across the bed to where she could see the fire, upon which she was gloating with rapture. Frances spoke to her; she replaced her pillow, and after a long look at the Shakeress she broke into

tears. The watchers with her in these early days of her convalescence always found her awake at dawn, when the robins and orioles and sparrows were weaving that fabric of song which seems to rise everywhere from the earth to the low-hovering heaven.

"It 's like the singin' of spirits, ain't it?" said one of the sisters who saw the transport with which she silently listened, her large eyes wide and her lips open.

"No!" cried the girl, almost fiercely. "It 's like the singing of the birds at home."

"Seemed as if she hated the spirits, as you might say," the Shakeress commented to the office sisters. It was the first time that any of them had heard Egeria mention her former home, for even in the fever her ravings had been of experiences in Boston unintelligible to them. But they had all noted the passion with which, when her recovery began, she turned to the natural world. She asked for the wild flowers, and day by day demanded if it were not yet time for the anemones, the columbines, the dog-tooth violets. If the spring lingered, or at times turned backward, nothing could rouse her from the dejection into which she fell, till the sun began to shine and the birds began to sing again. It was felt in the family to be foolish, or worse, but none of the Shakers could come home through field or wood without staying to pluck some token of the season's advance for the sick girl, who was longing so restlessly to go out and find the summer for her-

self. Her bed was decked with boughs of wilding bloom; on the shelves and window-sills the sylvan and campestral flowers gave their delicate colors and faint fragrances in whatever prim jug or sober vase the community could spare from its service. Something, surely, must be wrong about all this ministering to a love that might be said to savor of earthly vanities, but the most anxious of the nun-like sisters could not determine upon the sin; and while they wondered in just what sort they should deal with the elusive evil, a visiting brother from another community arrived to pronounce it no evil, but an instinct, wholesome as the harmless things themselves. Upon this, one of them brought and laid at Egeria's bedside a rug which she had worked with the pattern of a grape-vine, and which for five years she had kept fearfully hidden away in her closet, from compunction for its likeness to a graven image.

Egeria first went out on the 20th of May, that signal date when the spring, whatever her previous reluctances, brings up all arrears with the apple-blossoms. The season is then no longer late or early, but is the consummate spring; and all weather-wise hopes and fears are lost in the richness with which she keeps the promise of her name. It might well have seemed to the girl's impatience as she watched the orchard trees, sometimes from her closed window and sometimes from her open door, as the day was chill or soft, that the blossoms would never come; and even when every tip of the

mossed and twisted boughs was lit with the pink glimmer of a bud, and the trees' whole round was suffused with a tender flush of color, that the delicate petals of rose and snow would never unfold. The orioles and the bobolinks sang from the airy tops, and from the clover in the grassy alleys between the trees; in a neighboring field the oats were already high enough to brighten and darken in the wind. The canes of the blackberries and raspberries in the garden were tufted with dark green, and beyond the broad leaves of the pie-plant and the neat lines of sprouting peas, the grape-vines on Elder Joseph's trellis were set thick with short, velvety leaves of pinkish-olive, when suddenly, in a warm night, the delaying buds unfolded, and in the morning the apple-blossoms had come.

"I am going out under them," the girl said, when she saw them, and she set a resolute face against the fond anxieties of Sister Frances. Her father came and approved her wish.

"It won't hurt her; it will do her good," he said, with that somewhat propitiatory acquiescence with which he now indulged his daughter's whims. So, when the morning was well warmed through, as Sister Frances said, they spread some sad-colored wraps on the grass in the orchard, where the mingled wind and sun could reach her through the screen of blossoms. She walked a little tremulously, clinging to her father's arm, but a light of perfect happiness played over her faintly flushing face as she sank upon the couch. From where she

lounged she could look across the gardened intervale, declining from the street on which the hamlet was built, to the elms and sycamores that fringed the river-course, and beyond to other uplands, where the gray farmsteads dimly showed among the fields, and the white houses of villages clustered and sparkled in the sun. An unspeakable serenity filled the scene; and round her the little Shaker town was a part of the wide peace. There was seldom a passer on the sandy thoroughfare, now printed with the delicate shadows of the new maple leaves, and the stillness was unbroken by any sound of human life. The Shakers and their hired men were at work in the gardens and the fields, but they worked quietly; and the shops in which there was once the clinking of hammers on lap-stone and anvil had been hushed long ago by the cheaper industries of the world outside.

At the doors of the great family houses of brick a Shaker sister in strict drab and deep bonnet from time to time issued or entered silently. Nothing but the cat-bird twanging in the elder-bushes, and the bobolinks climbing in the sunlit air, to reel and slide down, gurgling and laughing, to the clover tufts from which they rose, broke upon the mellow diapason of the bees in the apple-blossoms overhead. Where she lay, propped on her arm, with her father seated beside her, some of the brothers and sisters came out of their way from time to time, to welcome her out-doors, and to warn her not to stay too long. Some rumor of her longing to

be in the weather, and of her passion for the blossoms and the birds amongst which she was blessed at last, had penetrated the whole community, and many who did not come to speak to her looked out unseen from their windows upon her happiness, which they might have found somewhat too earthly, in spite of the ideas lately promulgated by the visiting brother. With her blue eyes dreamily untroubled, she looked like some sylvan creature, a part of the young terrestrial life that shone and sang and bloomed around her; while flashes of light and color momently repaired the waste that sickness had made in her beauty. A sense of her exquisite harmony with the great natural frame of things may have penetrated the well-defended consciousness of Elder Joseph, as he paused near her, on his way home to dinner; but if it did, it failed to grieve him. He looked indulgently down at her; by an obscure impulse he gathered some of the richest sprays from the branches at hand, and dropped them into her lap.

"It seems right," he said, "to be getting well in the spring, when everything is taking a fresh start. I like to see the young woman looking so happy."

He addressed the doctor as well as Egeria, but it was she who answered.

"Yes; it would n't seem the same thing if it were fall. If it had been fall, I should not have got well; I should not have cared to get well."

"Nay," replied the Shaker; "if it is for us to choose, we are to choose to get well at all times."

"I mean," said the girl, "that I could not have chosen."

"You can't tell," observed her father. "Most fevers are autumnal, and convalescents are braced up by the approach of cold weather."

"Yes," she rejoined, "but now I seem to be stronger because my getting well is part of the spring."

"Our sympathetic relations with nature are subtle and strong," consented Boynton. "No one can tell just how much influence they have over our physical condition."

Egeria silently gazed upon the prospect. "It 's sightly, is n't it ?" asked the Shaker. "I have looked at it, now, for fifty spring-times, and it is as pretty as when it was first revealed to me."

Boynton started, and repeated, "Revealed ?"

"Oh, yee," returned the elder, "I first saw this place in a vision. It was when I was a young man, and several years before I was gathered in from the world outside. When I came here, I remembered the place and the persons I had seen in my vision, and I knew them all. Then I knew that it was meant, and I stayed."

"Is it possible !" cried Boynton. "That was very extraordinary. Have you had other psychological experiences ?"

"Nay," said Brother Joseph, briefly.

"But they are common among you ?" pursued Boynton.

"Oh, yee, we have all had some such intimations.

Have you never read Elder Evans's account of his dealings with the supernatural?"

"No, never!" cried Boynton, with intensifying interest.

"I will lend you the book. He tells some strange things. But we do not follow up such experiences. They serve their purpose, and that is enough. We try to live the angelic life. That will bring what is good in the supernatural to us, and we need not go to it."

"I think you make a mistake!" said Boynton, promptly. "These intimations are given expressly to invite pursuit. That is what miracles are for."

"Nay," returned the Shaker. "They are no miracles, if you follow them up to see them a second time. We must beware how we make the supernatural a commonplace. None of the disciples knew exactly who Christ was till he was taken from them; and he has only appeared since to one Doubter out of all the millions that have longed to believe on him. There is something in that. The other world cannot come twice to prove itself. Once is enough in miracles."

"Then you disapprove of spiritistic research?" demanded Boynton. "You condemn the desire to develop the dim hints of immortality which we all think we have received into certain and absolute demonstration?"

"Nay, I do not condemn any earnest striving for the truth, under proper conditions."

"I hope to find those conditions among you," Boynton hastened to say.

"We shall be happy to afford them," said the Shaker, smoothly, "if we can agree upon what they are. But it is right to say that we consider Shakerism the end and not the means of spiritualism." He passed on down the orchard aisle, the sunlight falling upon his quaint figure through the apple-blossoms.

Boynton's eyes followed him, but it was some time before he spoke. "After all," he said, as if musing aloud, "he is not one of the controlling forces of the community." He spoke with a certain effect of arming himself against opposition. "You had better come in, now, Egeria. It won't do for you to take cold."

"Yes, pretty soon. I don't wonder that they think they 're living the angelic life."

"Why?" asked her father, sharply.

"It 's like a heaven upon earth, here."

This vexed her father. "Yes, like heaven now, with the apples in bloom and the birds singing. But how much like heaven would it be with three feet of snow where you are lying?"

"Yes, let us go in. I had better not stay too long." She rose as if saddened by his words, and suffered herself to be helped back to the infirmary.

"The Swedenborgians," said her father, in reparation, "believe that in the other world winter is absorbed into the other seasons, and that the whole year is a sort of spring-time."

"Ah!" breathed the girl. "But I did n't mean spring. I should want the whole year to be summer, and I should want it to be in this world. I should like a heaven upon earth."

Her father looked closely at her. "This materialistic tendency is a trait of your convalescence. People are never so earthly as when they are recovering from a dangerous sickness. There is a kind of revolt from the world whose borders they have touched, — a rebound. The senses are riotous to try their strength again." He said these things as if accounting to himself for a fact, rather than explaining her condition to Egeria.

"Well, we have a right to our life here!" she cried, passionately. "Let the other world keep to itself!"

He did not answer her directly, and at other times he avoided encounter with anything like opposition in her. She would not stay in-doors after she once liberated herself. The spring came on rapidly and brought the hot weather before its time; but she throve in the heat. Before she was strong enough to walk much the Shakers appointed for her use an open buggy, garrulous and plaintive with age, and an old horse past his usefulness at the plow, but very fit for lounging along by-roads, and skilled in cropping wayside foliage as he went. With her father beside her in his Shaker dress, while she wore a worldlier garb, which she had beguiled her convalescence in fashioning from materials supplied by the family dress-maker, she took

the passers on the quiet roads with question and wonder. But they met few people, for they drove mostly over the grass-grown lanes that entered the forest, and the track oftener died away in the thickening vegetation than led any whither. Sometimes it arrived at a clearing deep in the woods, and accounted for itself as the way over which the teams had hauled wood in the winter, or got out logs. In other places it was a fading reminiscence of former population and led through the trees and thick undergrowth to the site of a vanished dwelling; a few apple-trees emerged from the ranks of their sylvan brethren; a rose or currant bush stood revealed among the blueberries or the sweet-fern; then the raw red and white of ruined masonry showed in the grass, and suddenly a cellar yawned before their feet, or they stepped over a well-curb choked with stones. Now and then they met lurking and evasive people on the lonesome roads, who were sometimes black, and who seldom seemed part of the ordinary New England life. If they followed up the track on which these men had shambled towards them, they might come upon a poverty-stricken dwelling of unpainted wood, which seemed never to have had heart to be a home. If they spoke to the slattern woman in the doorway, she was nasal enough, but otherwise the effect was as if some family of poor whites from the South had been dropped down in those Northern woods, with all its native environment of lounging dogs, half-starved colts, and frightened poultry.

Boynton philosophized the strange conditions as well as he could in the absence of any but obvious facts concerning them. When he stopped for a dipper of water at the well, from which he drew it with the old-fashioned sweep, and fell into talk with the women, they were voluble, but not very intelligible. They commonly took him for a Shaker, but Egeria gave them pause in their conjectures; and when he explained that he and his daughter were merely staying with the Shakers they said, Well, the Shakers were good folks, any way. There was sickness in some of these forlorn places, and once it happened to the doctor to be able to afford relief in the case of a suffering child. He was very tender with it, and gentle with the parents, who looked as if they would still be young if they had any encouragement, and on a second visit they asked him what he charged. When he said, "Nothing," they followed him and Egeria out to their buggy in a sort of helpless gratitude.

"Well, you 've done our little girl good, doctor," the woman said on the doorstep, "and we sha'n't forget it. The trouble is we don't seem to get no ways forehanded."

Boynton looked about him, as he took the reins in his hand, upon two or three other weather-beaten houses. "What place is this?" he asked.

"Well," said the woman, with sober apology, while her man grinned, "I d' know 's you may say it *has* any name. Skunk's Misery, they *call* it." She showed her sense of degradation in the brutal

grotesquery. "Well, call again," she said, as the doctor lifted his reins and chirruped to the old horse. "And you, too, lady," she added, nodding to Egeria.

"She kept her house in good order, for such a poor place," said the girl, when they had been watched out of sight by the man and his wife, "and the little girl's bed was sweet and clean. I should think they might be happy, there."

"In Skunk's Misery?" asked her father.

"If the house is their own," answered Egeria, simply. "They seemed good to each other."

"Oh, you will change your mind when you 're quite well again. You will want to see more of the world."

"I wish we had a house of our own, somewhere," said Egeria. "I should n't care where. I was thinking of that. I should like to keep house. I am going to get Frances to teach me everything."

"That will all come in good time," answered her father, soothingly. "And it will come with higher things. Only now get well."

"What higher things?" demanded the girl.

Boynton looked at her, and answered, evasively, "Things we could n't very well find in Skunk's Misery. Perhaps we shall go abroad. Would you like to go to Europe?"

"I would rather go home."

Boynton frowned, but did not answer; and they had escaped encounter for that time, at least.

As Egeria grew stronger they gave up their

drives somewhat, and took walks in the nearer woods. Oftenest their errand was to gather laurel, which was now coming richly into bloom. It filled the open spaces of the small clearings and wherever the woods were thin; it hid the stumps and consoled the poor, sterile soil with the starry profusion of its flower. One afternoon, when they had climbed to the hill-top where the Shakers of earlier times lay in their nameless graves, they looked out over the masses of the laurel, and it was like a second blossoming of the orchards. Egeria sat down on one of the fallen stones, without knowing that it covered a grave, and began putting her boughs of laurel into shape, choosing this and rejecting that, while her father went about among the forgetful tombs.

"I am glad we came here," he said, returning to her, "for I should not have liked to miss seeing their grave-yard."

"Their grave-yard?" she repeated.

"Yes; this is the old Shaker burial-ground."

She looked round. "I did n't know it," she sighed like one following out some tacit thought. "Well, what difference would it make if they had put their names on? They rest as well without it. And if they had put their names, who could remember who they were in fifty years from now?"

"They know one another in the other world just as well, without the record here," consented her father. "And it is n't here that we are to be remembered, at any rate."

"I wish it were!" said the girl, with passion, dropping her flowers into her lap. "I like this world, and I like to be in it. I wish we did n't have to die."

"Death is the condition of our advancement," said her father.

"But I would rather not advance," said Egeria. "I almost wish I had been born an animal. I should have had to die, but I should not have known it, and there would have been nothing of me to come back!" She went on putting together her boughs of laurel, and she wore that look of being remote within her defenses which a woman knows how to assume no less with her father than with her lover. She then adventurously throws out thoughts and opinions, as if they had just casually occurred to her, which she has perhaps reached after long, secret cogitation or sensation, or which are perhaps really what they seem.

"Why should n't you wish to come back, ages hence, and see what advance the world has made?" rejoined her father, after a pause.

"I should be afraid that I had n't kept up with it," answered Egeria. "The spirits that come back say such silly things."

"That is a childish way of looking at it," said her father with severity. "We have no more right to accuse them of silliness than we have to laugh at the foreigner who can express only the simplest things in English. The medium of thought must be so different in the two conditions of being that

the wonder is that returning spirits can understand and use our dialects at all."

"I don't see why they should forget their own language, if they 're the same persons there that they were here," Egeria returned, stubbornly. "Yes," she cried, "I would rather be here under the ground forever than be like some of the spirits! Oh, I should like to live always, too; but I don't call that living. I should like to live here in this world, — on the earth."

"Would you like to live always among the Shakers?" asked her father, willing to turn the current of her thoughts.

"They try all the time to make the other world of this world!"

"Perhaps that 's the only condition on which they find happiness in this world."

"Perhaps. But I don't believe so. We were not born into the other world. The Shakers are very good, and they have been kind to us. Yes, I could be contented among them. Are you going to stay with them, father?"

"I don't know," replied Boynton. "The time has n't come to decide, yet. I have been waiting. There is no hurry. I don't feel that we are here on charity, quite. I am able to render some equivalent."

"Yes," said Egeria, "and I am going to work as soon as they will let me. I know they would like to have us stay and join them."

"That was originally my idea. I still propose to do so, if I find them useful. Everything depends" — He stopped uneasily, and glanced at Egeria, but she showed no uneasiness.

XIV.

WHILE their place in the community was thus indefinite, they dwelt with the brothers and sisters who had first received them in the office. Egeria helped the sisters in their work there, and they all liked to have her about them, though it was tacitly agreed that she belonged chiefly to Sister Frances, with whom she served, making the beds, wiping the dishes, and putting the rooms in order, while Diantha and Rebecca devoted themselves to the more public duties of the place. As she grew stronger she would not be kept from taking her share in the family work. Frances forbade her helping in the laundry, where one of the brothers, vague through wreaths of steam from the deep boilers, presided over a company of sisters and boys, and afterwards marshaled them in hanging out the community wash; this, she held, involved dangers of rheumatism and relapse; but she allowed her to find a place in the herb-house, where a score of the young Shakeresses, seated on the floor of the wide, low room, before fragrant heaps of catnip, boneset, and lobelia, sorted and cleaned these simples for the brothers in the packing-room below. "That is sort of being out-doors," said Sister Frances, with a sly

allusion to the girl's well-known passion. Indeed, Egeria's chief usefulness appeared when the first wild berries came. Her father no longer accompanied her, for he found the heat too great a burden. The women went, five or six in a wagon, with one of the brothers, who drove, to the berry pasture a mile or two away, and they sang their shrill hymns while passing through the pine woods, that gave out a balsamic sweetness in the sun. At the verge of a westward-sloping valley was a stretch of many hundred acres, swept by a forest fire a few years before, and now rank with the vegetation which the havoc had enriched. Blueberries and huckleberries, raspberries and blackberries, battened upon the ashes of the pine and oak and chestnut, and flourished round the charred stumps; the strawberry matted the blackened ground, and ran to the border of the woods, where, among the thin grass, it lifted its fruit on taller stems, and swung its clusters in the airs that drew through the alleys of the forest. Here and there were the shanties of Canadian wood-cutters, whom the Shakers had sent to save what fuel they might from the general loss, and whom, at noonday, the pickers came upon, as they sat in pairs at their doors, with a can of milk between them, dusky, furtive, and intent as animals. From the first of the strawberries to the last of the blackberries, the birds and chipmucks feasted, and only stirred in short flights when the young Shakeresses, shy as themselves, invaded their banquet.

"Why, Egery," said one of them, the first day, "you empty your basket faster than any of us, and you said you never picked before. How do you always find such full vines? I do believe it's because they know you *love* to pick 'em so, and they just give you a little wink."

"Yes," she answered absently, like one entranced by the rich influences of the time and scene. She drank of the strong vitality of the earth and air and sun, and day by day the potion showed its effect in the serenity of her established health.

"Oh, nothing in the weather hurts *her*," said the girl who had surprised her secret understanding with the berries. "She keeps on with the birds and squirrels when the heat drives us off, and if it comes on to rain it runs off her as if she was a chipmuck or a robin; and next morning, when I'm as full of aches and pains as I can hold, she's all ready to begin again."

"Yee, that's so, Elizabeth," said the others, who laughed at this.

In their way they mingled what jollity they could in their work, and were sometimes demurely freakish in the depths of their poke-bonnets and under the wide brims of their hats. Certain of the elder brethren and sisters had their repute for humor, and made their quaint jokes without a bad conscience; while the younger played little pranks upon one another, with those gigglings and thrusts and pushes which accompany the expression of rustic drollery, and were not severely rebuked. Ege-

ria did not take part in their jocularities; but it was another joke of the young Shakers and Shakeresses, kept children beyond their time and apt to allege children's excuses when called to account, to say, "She made us do it — she looked so!"

They all liked her, and in spite of the secular fashion of her dress, to which she still clung, they treated her as if she were one of themselves, and were always to stay with them. Whatever may have been in their hearts, nothing in their manner betrayed surprise at the complete abeyance into which her supposed supernatural gifts had fallen. Perhaps, as people used to supernaturalism, to the caprice with which the other world uses this, they could be surprised at no lapse or access of divination, in any given case. At any rate, they all seemed content with her robust return to life and health, and if they were impatient for proof of the great things that her father had claimed for her, none of them showed impatience.

There were certain other faculties as dormant in her as her psychological powers. Once, as she passed through the pine woods where Laban had first found her and her father, he leaned across Sister Frances, who sat between them on the wagon-seat, and asked, "Do you know this road?" And when they came to that knoll beside the brook he asked again, "Do you mind this place?" He laughed when she said no. "Well, I don't much wonder. You didn't seem to be quite in your right senses. This is the place where I come across you and your father that day."

At another time, when a different course brought them home by the Elm Tavern, she dimly recalled the aspect of the house and asked what it was. "It seems as if I had seen it in a dream," she said.

"Must ha' had the nightmare pretty bad," returned Laban. "It 's a dreadful place."

"Dreadful," repeated Sister Frances. "But it 's just so when you 're comin' down with a fit of sickness, especially fevers. Everything seems in a dream, like."

Sister Frances rejoiced like a mother in the girl's health, which came back to her in no ethereal quality, but in solid evidence, in color and in elasticity of step and touch. She had known her before the fever only in that brief interval in which all her faculties were invested by the disease; and both the spiritual and material change wrought in her by convalescence might well have appeared greater than they were. She had seen her lie down a frail and fearful girl, deeply shadowed, as she fancied, by the memories of a troubled past; and she had seen her rise up and grow, in sympathy with the reviving year, into a broad, tranquil summer of womanly ripeness and strength. To the homely mind of Sister Frances she was like the young maple which Brother Joseph had found in a sombre thicket of the woods, and had set out in the abundant sunshine of the village street before the office gate, where it had thriven in a single year out of all likeness to itself. She admired this tree, and in telling Egeria of her fancy she gave her a pin-cush-

ion she had shaped in its image on the stem of a broken kerosene lamp: it was faithful, even to the emery bag in a red peak, like the first color which the maple showed at top in the autumn.

When the garden berries began to ripen, the two often talked long together as they sat in the cool basement of the office, sorting them with Shaker conscientiousness, and packing for market only boxes of honest fruit. Then the elder woman tried with maternal tenderness to draw nearer the life of this daughter of her care, in the fond hope that she might always keep her, and not lose her again to the world from which she had wandered.

"You seem happy here, Egeria," she would say, timorously feeling her way toward what had already been talked of in the family; and then, when the girl answered that she had never been so happy before, the sister's conscience gave her a check. It did not seem right to take advantage of Egeria's happiness among them to urge her to any step to which she was not moved by conviction. "You know," she resumed, "that we would n't like anything better than to have you stay among us, — you and your father both. All the family 's agreed about that. But it is n't for us to prevail without you feel a call to our life. What does your father say?"

"We have never talked much about it," said Egeria. "May be he is waiting for me to get well before he makes up his mind."

"Why, you look a great deal better than he does,

now!" cried Sister Frances, bluntly. "I want you should both stay with us till he gets strong again. I don't think your father 's over and above strong when he 's well."

"Well?" echoed the girl. "Don't you think he 's well?"

"Yee," answered Sister Frances, "but nervous, worried, like. I suppose he has n't had a chance yet to wear off the excitement of the world outside. You know you 've had a good fit of sickness. We all say that whatever happened before you came here, it 's dropped from you like a garment."

"Yes, like a garment," responded Egeria vaguely, letting her busy hands fall into her lap.

Frances took her by the arm. "Don't you go and be anxious, now, at what I said about your father."

"Oh, no!" said Egeria, recalling herself, and settling to work again.

"He 's as well as anybody need be. Only you 're so very well that anybody, to see you, would suppose you were the well one."

"I was wondering," mused the girl aloud, "if he had anything to perplex him. Sister Frances," she asked presently, "did any letter come for me while I was sick?"

"Nay. Did you expect a letter?"

"No," said Egeria, "there could n't have been any answer." She blushed, and fell into a reverie so profound that Frances, working alone at the berries, knew not how to bring back the talk to

the point from which it had strayed. She was not a person of much native tact, and the community life did not cherish tact among the virtues, counting truth much better; but now Sister Frances attempted a strategic approach.

"Sometimes," she said, "the young people who are gathered in have hopes in the world outside that make it hard for them to conform to the true life. And we women, we all know what such hopes are. I was young, and the world looked very bright to me when I was gathered in."

"You, Sister Frances? You gathered in? I thought you were brought up in the family from a child."

"Nay, I was gathered in — when I was twenty."

"When you were twenty? And I am nineteen."

"I came to the neighborhood on a visit, and one Sunday I went to a Shaker meeting, and I heard something said that made me think it was the true life. I used to be troubled about religion; but I've had peace for many years. At first it was considerable of a cross, wondering whether I'd acted for the best. He'd never said anything to me, and I d' know as he ever would. But he might have. That was what kept preying on my mind, whenever I got lonesome or doubtful about my choice. But I was helped to put it away. He 's been here, since — with *her*. *That* was the most of a cross of anything. At first, he did n't know me, so I don't suppose he ever *did* care, much."

"Had you ever," said Egeria, in a sort of scare,

"done anything that could have made him think *you* cared?"

"Nay. I was too proud for that."

"But even if you had done such a thing — by a mistake, or by doing something you thought was right, and then you had been afraid he might take it differently — you would have felt safe here."

"Yee, I should have felt safe." Frances waited for Egeria to speak, but the girl was again silent. "I did hope," resumed the sister, "in those young and foolish days, that he might be gathered in too. Then we could lived in sight of each other. But it wa'n't to be, and I don't know as 't would been for the best. Any rate, he got married. I 've heard they live out in Illinoy, and 't he 's made out real well. And I 'm at rest, here."

"Sister Frances," said Egeria, "do you think my father looks sick?"

"Well, I declare, if you ain't thinkin' of that silly talk of mine, yet! Anybody 'd look sick alongside of you. I only meant that he was a little more peaked."

"Yes," responded the girl, with a sigh, "he does n't look well."

She watched him at dinner, that day, and saw that he had a small and fastidious appetite, though the abundance of a Shaker garden was there to tempt him. "Are you feeling well, father?" she asked, when they went out after tea for a little stroll. "You ate hardly anything at dinner, and this evening you did n't touch your tea."

"Yes," he answered quickly, with a touch of irritation, "I am well; very well; perfectly well. But the hot weather is trying, and — and" —

"And what?" coaxed the girl. "Have you been thinking about something that worries you? Is there anything on your mind?"

"No, no. Nothing. Have you ever noticed it before? What has made you notice it?"

"I don't know. Sister Frances said she thought you didn't look as well as I do. That seemed strange."

"*You* are looking very well, Egeria. I am glad to see you looking so well. This fund of physical strength ought to contribute — There is nothing that is necessarily alien in it to — I am truly glad for your sake, my dear, that you are so well."

They were walking down the sloping roadside from the office gate toward the clump of old willows in whose midst stood the spacious stone bowl, scooped out of the solid granite by some forgotten brother in former years, and now tenderly, darkly green inside and out, with a tint of cool mold. When they reached the bank beside the trough, he dropped wearily on the grass, but she remained standing, with her arms sunken before her and her fingers intertwined, watching the soft ebullition of the spring in the centre of the bowl. Either she had not been aware of his approach to the matter of their tacit avoidance or she was indifferent to it. A smile played upon her face as the bubble continually rounded itself without breaking upon the

surface of the water; and in the mellow light of the waning day she looked strong and very beautiful. Her hair was darker than before her fever; her eyes had lost their look of vigilance and apprehension, and softly burned in their gaze; the sun and wind had enriched her fair Northern complexion with a tinge of the South. An artist or a poet of those who dream backward from fable might have figured her in his fancy as the Young Ceres: she looked so sweet and pure an essence of the harvest landscape, so earthly fair and good.

Her father glanced at her uneasily. "I don't like my environment, here," he broke out. "I am conscious of adverse influences."

She slowly lifted her eyes from the fountain, and looked at him with gravely smiling question, as if she had not quite understood.

"You asked me just now," he resumed, "whether I had been thinking about any vexatious matter. Have you seen nothing here of late to vex me?"

"No," she answered, with the same question, but without the smile.

"Nothing in the attitude of these people?"

"Their attitude?"

"I have tried to believe," he said vehemently, "that it was my fancy; but I can't be mistaken. They regard me with distrust; they have withdrawn from me the sympathy upon which I was placing all my hopes of success. No, no," he added, seeing her about to speak in refutation, "I am right. I feel it, I know it."

"They seem kinder to me than ever," Egeria ventured.

"They *are* kinder to you," returned her father. "They are distinguishing between us. They wish to keep you and to cast me out."

Egeria looked incredulous. "But how could they do that? Nothing could separate us!"

"I am glad to hear you say that," said her father, huskily. "There have been times of late when I thought — when I was afraid — You have seemed indifferent" —

"Father!".

"I know that I wronged you." He turned his face, and they were both silent, till Egeria spoke.

"If what you think is true, we must go away. Where will we go? Shall we go home?"

"No, I can't go there. It 's impossible."

Egeria did not reply directly, but after a while she said, "Father, do you ever think of Mr. Hatch?"

"No. Why should I think of him?"

"He lent us money, and he expected to find us at home when he got back."

"His loan could scarcely have paid the debt he was under to me. I regarded it in that light, and so did he. We had no obligation to be where he expected to find us."

"No; but if he went there, and did n't find us, it would make grandfather very anxious."

"I 'm not obliged to preserve your grandfather from anxiety. He has n't known our movements

since we left home. But I do care for Mr. Hatch. I will write him, and tell him where we are. Where was he going?"

Egeria turned a little white. "I — I don't know," she faltered. "I can't remember. Wait! Yes — he gave me his address, and I — I can't think what I did with it."

"Perhaps you put it in your bag with the money."

"Yes — I did. I put it in my bag. It 's gone. Everything about that time seems so dim, so" —

"It 's no matter; not the least," said her father. "He probably has n't returned to the East. When he does, he can readily find us out." Egeria looked grieved and troubled, but he hurried on to say, "The great question is how to bring about the results — the important results — for which I came here. I will not be driven from conditions which I thought so favorable, without an effort. Their leading men may turn against me if they choose; it is their peril and their loss; but the great mass of the community will be with me in any collision."

"Why, what makes you think there is a feeling against you, father, in any of them?"

"Do you remember that day in the orchard when you first went out? Joseph and I had some words, in which he showed plainly what had been fermenting in his mind, when he intimated the subordination of spiritualism to Shakerism. I understood his drift, though at the time I said nothing. Afterward the matter dropped; but within a few days I

have been made to feel very distinctly a sphere of opposition. They think, the leading men, that my utilization of their conditions will undermine their whole system. And so it will. Their system is unnaturally and ridiculously mistaken; next after their spiritualism, their communism is the only thing about them that is fit to survive. Their angelic life, as they call it, is an absurd delusion, the dream of a sick woman."

"Oh, I hope you won't do anything to break up their life!" cried the girl, in simple trust of his power. "They have been so good to us."

"Their system may remain, for all me," returned her father. "Even in riding down the opposition to me I shall be careful of their rights. Egeria," he said, "you must have observed that during your long convalescence I have spared you all discussion of this matter?"

"Yes," she admitted, apprehensively.

"I noticed that it seemed to irritate you, — to cost you an effort of mind and of will, which I was unwilling to tax you with till you had regained your full strength. The delay has been very irksome to me. I felt that we were losing precious time — that we were being placed in a false position; the waiting has worn upon me, as you see." He looked even haggard in the coming twilight. He had lost flesh, and two loose cords hung where his double chin had been. "The question now is whether you will be ready when I call upon you for the test which I am impatient to make."

Egeria sank down upon the bank not far from him, and pulled weakly at a tuft of grass. "I was in hopes," she said sadly, "that you had given it up, father."

"Given it up!" he cried in amaze.

"Why could n't we wait?" she asked.

"Wait? Till when?"

"Till we are dead. Then we shall know whether there is any truth in it all. It will be only a little while at the longest."

"A little while!" exclaimed the doctor indignantly. "We may live to be a hundred! There are people in those houses yonder," — he indicated the dormitories with a wave of his hand, — "who have had everything to kill them in their prime; who came here with the women who were to be their wives, or who left husband and children and home to embrace this asceticism; who for scores of years have had the memories of these to brood upon in their withered hearts. We can't wait for death. We have a right to know the truth from life."

They had so often talked of this deep concern as knowledge to be acquired that probably neither of them found anything grotesque or terrible in this phase of the discussion. Egeria now only urged vaguely, "We have the Bible."

"Yes," rejoined her father, bitterly, "the Bible! the book with which they try to crush our hopes! the record, permeated and saturated with spiritualism from Genesis to Revelation, by which they

pretend to disprove and forbid spiritualism! Shall one revelation suffice for all time? Shall we know nothing of the grand and hopeful changes which must have taken place in the world of spirits, as in this world, during the last eighteen hundred years? Are we less worthy of communion with supernal essences than those semi-barbarous Jews? Let us beware how we refuse the light of our day, because the light of the past still shines. Shines? Flickers! In many it is extinct. How shall faith and hope be rekindled? Egeria, you must not try to argue with me on this point. You must submit yourself and your power implicitly to me. Will you do so?"

"I don't know what you mean by my power. I have no power."

"You have power, if you think you have. What I ask is that you will not oppose your will to mine."

"I will not oppose you," she answered in a low voice. A gush of tears blinded her, and dimmed the beautiful world. "You know how I have always hated this, father, — ever since I was old enough to think about it. A thing that seemed to be and seemed not to be, — it scared me! And when it all stopped I thought you would n't want to begin it again. But I will try to do whatever you ask me."

"I can't understand your repugnance," said her father. "If this power of yours should bring you face to face with your mother" —

"I never saw her, — I should not know her; and she would not know me for the little baby she left!" cried the girl desperately. "Besides, I can wait to go to her. And she can wait, too. I don't believe she would ever come. What good does it all do? Oh, it 's dreadful to me!"

"The time has been, Egeria," rejoined her father, "when your attitude would have discouraged me. Now, it only gives me pain. I am convinced that your own opinions and ideas of the matter are of no consequence to the agencies operating through you. All that I ask of you is that you yield yourself passively to my influence. Will you do this?"

"Oh, yes, I will do all that I can. Oh, I wish I had died in the fever!"

"You talk childishly," said her father. "How do you know that death would have released you from your obligation to this cause? It may be your office in the next world, as it is in this, to be the medium of communication between embodied and disembodied spirits."

"Then I hope there won't be any other world."

Her father looked angrily at her as she rose and stood beside the rustic fountain. One of the Shaker boys, uncouth in his wide straw hat and misshapen trowsers, came by with some cows from pasture, and they stopped to drink from the great stone bowl. The voices of bathers in the river half a mile away floated sad across the intervening space of meadow land. The air was so heavy with dew that the rumble of a distant railroad train was

as clear as if near at hand in the valley which the sound even of the steam whistle seldom visited. As Egeria and her father walked back to the office the crickets trilled along the path. The smell of the prosperous gardens beyond the wall came to them, and mingled with the thick, sweet scent of the milkweed by the wayside.

There was a little group before the office door. At the foot of the steps stood Humphrey, and with him Joseph and Elihu; Diantha and Rachel were seen within the door-way, and Frances sat on the threshold. They were talking earnestly; at sight of the doctor and Egeria they lowered their voices, and as they drew near they ceased speaking altogether, with the consciousness of sincere people interrupted by those of whom they have been speaking. At the same time Sister Frances made room upon the step, and beckoned to Egeria with more than her usual fondness, — with a sort of tender reparation and defiance. The girl took the place, and her father remained standing with the other men.

It plainly cost Elihu an effort to break the silence, but he said, after a moment, "Have you seen the account of the exposure of that materialization medium out in St. Louis?"

"No," said the doctor; "but nothing of that sort surprises me. It is too soon yet for successful materializations, and all attempts at it are mixed with imposture."

"There 's quite a long account," rejoined Elihu, "in yesterday's Tribune."

He made a movement to take the paper out of his breast pocket. "I don't care to see it," said the doctor abruptly; "I can very well imagine it. Those things are sickening. Some wretched creature — a woman, I suppose — trying to eke out her gift by cheating, to get her bread. It rests with you Shakers to rescue this precious opportunity from infamy. But you must take hold of it in no half-hearted way."

"What do you mean?" asked Elihu.

"You have the conditions here of perfect success, as I heard you boast when I first saw you in the Fitchburg depot at Boston. You are released from all thought of the morrow; the spectre of want that pursues other men does not dog your steps; you have neither wife nor husband nor child to cling about your hearts and weaken your will to serve the truth with absolute fidelity. Your discipline has rescued you from the vanity of making men wonder. There is nothing to prevent you from developing a perfect mediumship amongst you."

"You imply," rejoined Elihu, with warmth, "that we have failed of our duty in this respect. You don't seem to realize that our very existence is a witness to the truth of an open relation between the spiritual and the material worlds. As a people we had birth in the inspired visions of Ann; the very hymn we sang yesterday was breathed through our lips by angelic authority; the tradition of prophecy has never been broken with us. We gave spiritualism to the world."

"Yes, you gave spiritualism to the world," retorted Boynton, "to mock its hopes and baffle its aspirations and corrupt its life. You flung it out a flaming brand, to be blown upon by cupidity and lust and ambition, till its heavenly light turned to an infernal fire, while you remained lapped in your secure prosperity, counting your gains; adding acre to acre, beef to beef, sheep to sheep; living the lives of clowns and peasants on week days, and on the Sabbath dancing before the Lord, for the amusement of the idlers who come to your church as they go to a circus."

"Friend," interrupted Elihu warningly, "you are abusing our patience!" The other Shakers looked shocked and alarmed, and Egeria rose to her feet.

"I *mean* to abuse your patience. I mean to sting you into life. I mean to make you think of your heavenly origin, and realize how unworthy you have grown. You have subordinated your spiritualism to your Shakerism"—

"Spiritualism was never anything but a means to Shakerism," angrily retorted Elihu.

"I would make it the *end* of Shakerism. How has it profited you as a means?" demanded Boynton.

"It has made us what we are. It gave us a discipline and a rule of life, because it descended, unasked, from heaven. But your secular spiritualism which you want to have us take up, and which has continued through solicitation and entreaty,

has given you no code of morality. It has been a vain show, making men worse and not better, and tempting them to all manner of lies. And you wish us to take it up at the point to which the world has brought it? Nay! You wish us to subordinate the angelic life, and the good that has crowned it, to the mere dead means? Nay! To value the staff by which we have climbed, and not the height we have reached? Nay! Prove first that in your hands it has not become a stock to conjure with, — to be cast on the ground and turned into a serpent for a wonder before Pharaoh and a confusion of true prophecy, — and then we will take it up again."

The men's faces had grown red, and they approached each other angrily.

"You have deceived me!" cried Boynton. "You led me to believe that among you I should find the sympathy and support which are essential to success."

"We led you to believe nothing," retorted Elihu. "An accident threw you among us, after we had fully and fairly warned you that we should not receive you or any one without deliberation. We welcomed you kindly, and you have had our best."

"Elihu, Elihu!" softly pleaded Sister Frances, "it is n't for us to boast of our good deeds." The others silently looked from him to her.

"There is no vainglory in the truth, Frances," answered Elihu, severely. "We have been assailed with unjust tauntings."

"And I," said Boynton, "have been provoked to a harsher frankness than I meant to use, by your indifference to an interest infinitely more vital than any rule of life; by a gradually increasing enmity here which I have now felt for some time, and have struggled against in vain. There has been a withdrawal of confidence from me."

"You have no right to say that," Elihu promptly retorted. "The conditions remain precisely the same as when you first unfolded your plans to us in family meeting. We dealt plainly with you then, and we know nothing more of you now than we knew within two days after your arrival here. You made certain pretensions then, and you have fulfilled none of them. Instead of that, you come after nearly three months' time, and require us to lay aside our industries, and join you in a pursuit which has proved the vainest and idlest that has ever wasted the human mind."

"You have twice upbraided me, now," said Dr. Boynton, "with my failure to make good my claim to your confidence. You shall not upbraid me a third time. You knew why I was waiting. You knew that it was at a cost almost like life itself that I waited, and that I counted every hour of delay as a drop of blood wrung from my heart. But I will delay no longer. You shall have the proof now — at once — this very night. Call your family together. We won't lose another moment. Egeria!"

Egeria started: the quarrel — for it had assumed this character — had begun so suddenly, and proba-

bly without intention or expectation on either side, though this is by no means certain; but she must have known whither it tended.

"You are right!" cried Elihu, with equal heat. "There is no time like the present. Matters have come to such a pass that something must be done."

"Call your family together!" repeated Boynton, defiantly.

"There is no need; this is the evening for family meeting," the Shaker rejoined.

In fact, while they had been disputing, a group of the younger Shakers and Shakeresses had formed about the door of the family house in which the meeting was to be held, and their voices, unheeded by the angry disputants and their listeners, had risen on the cool twilight air. At that distance the white dresses of the young girls, freshly put on for the evening worship, showed pale through the gathering dusk, and their singing, robbed of its shrillness, was the voice of that disembodied devotion which haunts dim cathedral arches, and in our bright New World sometimes drifts out of open church windows to the ear of the passer, taking his heart with an indefinite religious passion and yearning.

XV.

THE office sisters went in-doors to make some change in their dress for the meeting; Elihu and Joseph walked away together; Egeria had shrunk from the tearful embrace of Sister Frances, and she now slowly followed with her father, who continued in strenuous appeal to her, till they reached the door of the family house, and entered with the group awaiting them there. A dull look was in her eyes when they came into the hall, and she sank absent-mindedly into her usual place in one of the back rows of sisters, away from the light of the kerosene lamps burning in brackets against the wall. Her father, for reasons of his own, chose to sit apart from the men, and he now retired to one of the corners, where he remained with his head dropped on his hand during the greater part of the service.

Brother Humphrey did not join the rest till the meeting was nearly over. He had stayed to close up the office for the night, and to wait for the return of Brother Laban, who was away on business, and he was about to lock one of the front doors, when he found himself confronted at the threshold by two men, one of whom asked if he could oblige them with a night's lodging.

"We do not keep a house of entertainment," said Humphrey, willing to evade, but unwilling to deny.

"Oh, I 'm perfectly aware of that," said the stranger, "but I suppose you don't turn people away. I was given to understand at the village, back here, that you sometimes took pity on wayfarers."

"Yee, we do," said Humphrey, still holding the door ajar.

"Then take pity on us, my dear friend, and on our horse," said the stranger, not otherwise indicating the vehicle he had left at the gate, "and we will pay you what you like for your compassion." He pushed in, and Humphrey mechanically setting the door wider his companion followed. "We can sleep in a double-bedded room, if you can't give us two single ones."

"Nay," said Humphrey, "you can have two single rooms. Sit down," he added, showing them into the office parlor.

"Ah, you double nothing, I suppose," said the stranger. "Thanks!" He dropped into a rocking-chair, but when Humphrey went out, to see that the rooms were quite ready, he sprang actively to his feet again and went peering about the room with the lamp which Humphrey had left on the table. He stooped down and examined the legs of this piece of furniture. "No! Evidently the Shaker conscience is against the claw-foot. Probably they regard it as but one remove from the cloven-foot. And I don't suppose there 's such a

thing as a brass-mounting of any sort in the building. But really, this bare wall with the flat finish is n't so bad ; it 's expressive of the bare walls and flat finish of Shakerism ; an instance of what the Swedenborgians call correspondence. Look here, my dear fellow ! Here is something very original — *ab*-original — in rugs. That 's a good bit of color." He seized upon one of the braided rugs on the floor and partly lifted it. " Look at this ! "

" Oh, let it alone," said the other, with a yawn. He looked not very well, and he glanced at his feet with the weariness that despairs of ever getting to bed with such an obstacle as boots in the way.

" But you don't understand," persisted the first, clinging to the rug. " This must be home-dyed. These yellows and reds — I was admiring your rug," he explained to Humphrey, who now reappeared. " It 's something uncommon in color."

" Yee," said the Shaker ; " we don't generally like our things so gay. Your rooms are ready."

" Ah, then we won't detain you," said the stranger ; but he caught sight of the long clock at the lower end of the hall, into which they issued, and turned from going up-stairs to look closer at it, with his hand lamp. " This is good ! Very good ! A genuine Marm Storrs. A family heir-loom, I fancy ? "

" Nay, I don't know," said the Shaker, stopping half-way up the stairs ; " it came here before I did. I don't know who brought it."

" You don't care for colonial bricabrac ? But

you should. It 's the only thing we can justly aspire to, this side of the water. You could pick up some nice things in the country. Have you a spinning-wheel?"

"Yee. But we don't use it. It 's cheaper to buy our linen."

"Of course. But you 've no idea how much character it would give that pleasant parlor of yours."

Humphrey answered neither yea nor nay. The other stranger, who had stalked up-stairs past him, asked from the upper hall, "Which room is mine?" And when Humphrey pointed it out he entered and shut the door behind him.

"What singing is that?" asked his companion, as he paused again at the open window near the top of the stairs.

"It is our family meeting," answered Humphrey.

"Family meeting!" repeated the stranger briskly. "Would it be possible — could you allow a secular person like myself to look in a moment?"

"Nay," said the Shaker, composedly, without vouchsafing any explanation.

The stranger looked at him as if puzzled. "I could n't go?"

"Nay," repeated Humphrey, as before.

"But really, I 've heard of people attending your meetings, have n't I?"

"Yee."

"Then why can't I go?"

"This is a family meeting."

"Oh! Is this my room?"

"Yee. Good-night," he said, while the stranger was still hesitating at his door-way, and turned away; the latter then answered his good-night, and went in, and Humphrey descended to his room below, where, after he had put up the strangers' horse, he busied himself restlessly in working at his accounts, till Laban raised the latch of the door.

"Laban," said Humphrey, "there are two strangers — young men — in the house, that I 've just give rooms to. One of us has got to stay away from the meetin', I presume. It won't do to have 'em alone here, these times."

"Nay," said Laban, taking off his hat, and hanging it on its appointed peg before he sat down. "I will stay."

"I d' know 's I 'd ought to let ye," rejoined Humphrey. "It 's a meetin' of uncommon interest; quite excitin', as you may say."

"Why, what 's the matter?"

"Well, Friend Boynton and Egery are goin' to give what they call a test see-aunts, I suppose. Mahters have come to a head, all at once, — I don't rightly know how. But Elihu and Friend Boynton, they got into consid'able of a dispute, just now; and Friend Boynton was tol'ble bitter, and spoke revilin's that seemed to kind o' edge Elihu on, and first we know they 'd cooked it up between 'em that the' wa'n't any time like the present to prove whether spiritualism was better than Shakerism. I don't believe 't *she* more 'n half liked it, the way she looked."

"I don't seem to care anything about goin'," said Laban. "I 'll stay."

"Why, thank ye, Laban!" cried Humphrey, rising with an eagerness which betrayed itself, now that he had satisfied the scruples of conscience by setting forth the meeting in the most attractive colors, and giving Laban a free choice whether to go or stay.

When he came into the meeting Brother Elihu was on his feet, speaking. Humphrey softly crept to the place left vacant for him, beside Elihu, and sat down.

"I want," Elihu was saying, "that all the brethren and sisters here present should wish well to Friend Boynton in his experiment. He claims that it is necessary to his success that there should be no feeling of enmity or suspicion towards him, and if any of us have such feelings I hope they will try to put them aside. I shall try to do so, for my part, with all my heart. Hard words have just passed between Friend Boynton and me, and I am willing to own that I was hasty and wrong in much that I said. I shall truly rejoice in all the success that he hopes for to-night."

He sat down, and a little stir passed through the rows of listeners. One of them began a hymn, and they sang it through, while Dr. Boynton waited with a face of haughty offense. When the singing ceased, he came forward from his corner, and stood between the rows of brothers and sisters.

"I thank Elihu," he said, without looking at

him, "for his good intentions towards myself, and I freely acquit him for what he has said. I have myself nothing to withdraw and nothing to regret. Nor do I ask, in what I shall do to-night, any mood of especial assent or sympathy in you, or even of neutrality. I am not here to try an experiment. I am here to exhibit certain facts of psychological science, as thoroughly ascertained as the transmission of the electric current that bears your messages from Maine to California." He seemed to gather defiance from his rotund phraseology; he rang the syllables of the last word through the hall with a clarion hardness. "When I last stood here," he continued, "and addressed you upon this subject, I had to ask your patience. My daughter had fallen sick with a fever, of which no one could forecast the event. She lived, and made a recovery which, though painfully slow, is complete; and she is once more fully *en rapport* with my purposes and wishes. We shall begin with some simple experiments in biology, or, as it was originally called, mesmerism; and we shall gradually proceed to a combination of this science with spiritism, in a union which it has been the end and aim of all my inquiries to effect, — which I have foreseen from the beginning as the only true development of perfect mediumship. All that I shall ask of *you*," said Dr. Boynton, with a certain emphasis on the last word, turning on his heel, so as to include all present in his glance of somewhat contemptuous demand, "is your strict attention and

your perfect silence. Stay! I shall ask one of you to oblige me by setting a chair here, where all can see, and by lending me a handkerchief." His voice had fallen to the colloquial tone, and it touched something of its old suavity. But when Humphrey had set the chair, and Diantha had given him a folded handkerchief, he shook out the linen with a flirt, and called, with a sternness that startled all, "Come forward, Egeria!"

The girl rose from her place beside Sister Frances, and slowly advanced, with the Shakeress beside her.

"Come forward alone!" commanded her father, and Frances shrank back into her seat again, while Egeria continued to advance, and took her place in the chair as he directed with a wave of his hand. Those who were nearest saw that she was very pale, and they spoke afterwards of a peculiar look in her face, "as if," they said, "the life had gone out of it." She was also thought to tremble, and she let her arms fall into her lap, with a long patient sigh that was heard all over the room, and that brought tears to the eyes of some.

Her father stood drawing the handkerchief through his hand. "We will begin, as I said, with some of the most elementary phases of mesmerism, and we will work up through these to its ultimation in clairvoyance, at which point of junction we will invoke the aid of spiritism, the science into which it merges, and we will then continue our inquiries in a dark séance. For the present the lights can remain as they are."

He came round in front of his daughter, and steadily regarded her. "Fix your eyes on mine," he said, as if addressing a stranger.

She obeyed, lifting her eyes with an effect of mute appeal, while the corners of her mouth drooped.

"When I count three," continued her father, "your eyes will close. One, two, three."

Her eyelids fell, and she remained as if in a quiet sleep. Her father approached, and with a series of downward passes assumed to deepen the spell.

"Now," he said, turning to the intent spectators, "we will exhibit some well-known phenomena of this condition. The subject is in a complete mesmeric trance, and is entirely under my control. I can will her to remain in that chair, and she will have no power to rise. If I were simply in my own mind, without the utterance of a word, to will her to go to the house-top and fling herself down, she would instantly do so. If I willed her to put her hand in the flame of that lamp, she could not refuse; neither would she feel any pain, if I forbade her to feel pain. She sees, hears, tastes, feels, whatever I will. She has no being except in my volition, and I have not a doubt that, terrible as it may seem, if I were to will her death, she would cease to breathe."

His hearers had listened with interest that deepened at each successive assertion; at the last a sort of moan ran through the ranks of the sisters. The brothers remained hardly less impressively silent.

"You can now easily understand," resumed Boynton, "what a tremendous engine, what a superhuman agency, such a power as that I exert must be in the development of a spirit medium. It is to this end that I have chiefly exerted it in the case of my daughter. My theory has been that the medium's obsession by spirits is often so thorough that mind and body alike succumb to their influence, and that the medium is thus so obscured as to be able to transmit no intelligible result. It is at this point that the mesmeric power, sterile in itself, and hitherto useless, comes to her rescue. It stays and supports her; it enables another to reinforce her will, and she receives a distinct and ineffaceable impression from the other world. I ask you to consider but for a moment the vast consequences to flow from such a development. I ask you to do this, not in your behalf or mine; for we *know*, by our converse with spirits, that we shall live hereafter, — that another world lies beyond this, in which we shall abide forever. But you who dwell here, in the security, the sunshine, of this faith, have little conception of the doubt and darkness in which the whole Christian world is now involved. In and out of the church, it is honey-combed with skepticism. Priests in the pulpit and before the altar proclaim a creed which they hope it will be good for their hearers to believe, and the people envy the faith that can so confidently preach that creed; but neither priests nor people believe. As yet, this devastating doubt

has not made itself felt in morals; for those who doubt were bred in the morality of those who believed. But how shall it be with the new generation, with the children of those who feel that it may be better to eat, drink, and make merry, for to-morrow they die forever? Will they be restrained by the morality which, ceasing to be a guest of the mind in us, remains master of the nerves? Will they not eat, drink, and make merry at their pleasure, set free as they are, or outlawed as they are, by the spirit of inquiry, by the spirit of science, which has beaten down the defenses and razed the citadel of the old faith? I shudder to contemplate the picture. In view of this calamitous future, I, as a spiritualist, cannot refrain from *doing;* and I appeal to you, as spiritualists, to shake off this drowse of prosperity, this poppied slumber of love and peace, and buckle on the armor of action. What right have you, I ask, — what right have you Shakers to remain simply a refuge for the world's lame and halt and blind? This dream of perfect purity, of affectionate union, of heavenly life on earth, is very sweet; and I too have been fascinated by it. I too have asked myself why there should not be some provision in Protestantism, as there is in Romanism, for those who would retire from the world and dedicate themselves to humble industry, to meek communion with the skies, to brotherly love. But I tell you that this is all a delusion and a snare. On your purity rests the guilt of the world's foulness; on

your union the blame of the world's discord; on your heavenly peace the responsibility of the world's hellish unrest. To you was first given, in this latter time, the renewed gospel of immortality, the evidence of spiritual life, the truth that matter and spirit may converse for the salvation of mankind. What have you done with this priceless gift? Have you cherished it, kept alight the precious jewel, to shine before the eyes of men; or have you flung it into the world to be trampled under foot by the swinish herd of sorcerers, who will yet turn again and rend you, unless you fulfill your duty? Every one of you here should become a messenger of the truth, and devote himself and herself to its promulgation. Go forth into the world, though it leave your home desolate, and serve the truth! Or, better still, break up this outworn brotherhood, this barren union in which you dwell, a company of aging men and women, childless, hopeless, with whom their heritage must perish, and form with me on its ruins a new Shakerism, — a Shakerism which shall be devoted to the development of spiritistic science; which shall — which shall " —

He paused for the word, and Brother Elihu suddenly rose. " I would remind Friend Boynton," he said, " that we are waiting to witness the mesmeric phenomena which he has promised us."

The brethren and sisters, who had been unawares drawn upward and forward by Boynton's eloquence, sank back into their seats, but some of the latter turned a reproachful glance at Elihu, in wonder

that he could have the heart to interrupt the heroic strain. Then all eyes reverted to Egeria, who in the general forgetfulness had sat with her head drooping and her person dejected in a weary lassitude.

The doctor stopped, stared at Elihu, and caught his breath. He could not collect his thoughts at once, or master his overstrung nerves; but when he regained his voice he said dryly, "If you will do me the favor to look at your watch, I will show you the least of these phenomena."

Brother Elihu promptly took out his watch and held it in his hand.

"Egeria," said the doctor, "tell me the time by Elihu's watch."

The girl lifted herself like one peering forward, but her eyes were still closed. "The case is shut," she answered.

"That is true," Elihu declared. "I had shut it." He opened it.

"Look now, Egeria."

She remained in the same posture for some time. "I can't tell," she said at last. "I can't see."

The doctor smiled triumphantly. "Oh, I had forgotten to bandage your eyes. You can't see, of course, unless your eyes are bandaged." He bound the handkerchief, which he had continued to draw through his hand, over her eyes. "Now look."

"I can't see," repeated the girl.

Boynton laughed. "Really," he said, "I must apologize for having forgotten some essential condi-

tions of these simpler phenomena. We had advanced so far beyond them that I did n't recur to them at once in all their details. I can't, of course, will the subject to know what I don't know myself. If I were to guess at the time, she must necessarily repeat my guess." He went quickly to Elihu, and glanced at the watch; then returning to his place beside Egeria's chair, he looked off at a distant point and said, with a tone of easy indifference, "Well, Egeria, what time is it?"

The girl fell back into her chair, and putting up her hands took the bandage from her eyes, which she fixed upon her father's face in a passion of pity and despair.

"Let it go, Friend Boynton," said Elihu kindly. "There is no haste. Another time will do as well. Perhaps Egeria has not quite recovered."

"Yee," repeated one and another of the brethren and sisters, "another time will do as well."

"No," said Boynton, "another time will *not* do as well." He was strongly moved, but he made a successful effort to command his voice. "My daughter has been so habitually under my influence that I had not thought it worth while to go through the preliminaries we use with a fresh subject. But as a great interruption has taken place during her fever, perhaps this has become necessary." While he spoke, he was searching in his different pockets. He continued bitterly: "I was once the possessor of a silver piece which I used in producing the mesmeric trance, but it would not be

strange if I had parted with it in the distress which threw me upon your charity. If any of you happens to have a silver coin of any sort" —

Few of these simple communists often had money about them; and in those days of paper currency even the business men of the family knew very well that there was no silver in their pockets. If a silver coin was the indispensable condition of the mesmeric slumber, apparently Boynton stood on safe ground.

But with a quick "Ah!" he came upon the piece he was seeking in his pocket-book. He pressed it between his palms, keeping his eyes fixed upon his daughter's. Then he put it in her open hand, and bade her look at it without winking, till her eyelids fell. As they closed he softly removed the piece, and made a number of downward passes over her face. There was a pause, during which Boynton was about to say something to his audience, when Egeria opened her eyes and rose from her chair.

"I can't, I can't!" she cried, pitifully. "I've tried, but indeed, indeed, I can't." She stood before him, wringing her hands, and longing to cast her arms about his neck; but the sternness of his reproachful face forbade her. He opened his lips to speak, but no sound came from them. One of the brothers nearest him thought that he tottered, and half rose, with outstretched hands, to support him. Sister Frances was already at Egeria's side; she drew her head down upon her shoulder with a motherly instinct, while a murmur of sympathy went through the house.

Boynton repelled the friendly hand extended towards him. "Let me alone," he said; "I can take care of myself." He turned about, and lifting his voice bravely addressed the meeting: "We have failed, — totally and completely failed, upon as fair a trial as I could have wished. I do not attempt to account for the result, and I cannot dispute any conclusions which you may draw from it in regard to ourselves."

Elihu stood up. "Friend Boynton, we believe you are an honest man."

"Yee, we do!" was repeated from bench to bench.

"I thank you," replied Boynton, in a breaking voice. "Then I can ask you to let me say that our failure is a profound mystery to me, and belies all our past experience. I do ask you to believe this; I ask you to let me say it, and to let it remain with you as my last word. For myself, I cannot lose faith in the past and keep my sanity. But somehow I see that the power has passed from us. In any case our destiny is accomplished among you. We must go out from you self-condemned. Before we go, I wish to acknowledge all your kindness, and to ask your forgiveness for such words of mine as have wronged you. Come, Egeria."

The girl came forward to where her father stood, and he took her hand and passed it through his arm.

"You must n't leave us, Friend Boynton," said Elihu. "We wish you to stay. We wish you to

stay," he repeated, at a dazed look of inquiry from the doctor, "and take all the time that you want for your investigations."

"Yee, that is so," assented all the voices in the room successively. Brother Humphrey alone continued silent, and he was ordinarily so undemonstrative that his tacit dissent would harldly have been noticed, but for his saying, before Boynton could collect himself for reply, "There ain't nothin' agin Friend Boynton but what he can clear up with a word to the elders, and I jine with ye all in askin' of him to stay."

"What do you mean?" demanded Boynton, turning fiercely upon him. "If you know anything against me, I wish you to speak out."

Brother Humphrey, who could scarcely have meant to intimate any mental reservation, hastened to answer in alarm, "I ha'n't got any doubts of ye, Friend Boynton. I think just as the rest do. We 'd believe *you*."

"Believe me about what? I insist that you speak out."

Humphrey looked at the faces near him for help, but there was only pity and surprise in them. "It ain't no time or place," he began.

"It is the very time and the very place," retorted Boynton. "There can be no other like it. I wish you to say what you mean before the whole family. There is nothing in my life which I wish secretly examined into. I absolve you from all your scruples, and I wish, I demand, I require, that you speak out."

Humphrey rose with a sort of groan. "I think," he said, "as much as any on ye that there ought to be forgivin' and forgettin', and I ain't one to bear resentment for revilin's that 's been passed on Shakerism here to-night. But what I thought, if Friend Boynton was goin' to stay amongst us, he 'd ought to have a chance to clear himself. We all know what 's been flyin' about the neighborhood here, and it ain't fair to us, and it ain't fair to him, to let it go without a word. I don't want he should feel that we 're tryin' on him, but I want him to know what 's said, for all I don't believe in breakin' a bruised reed."

"As I said before, if you have heard anything to my disadvantage, I wish you to speak out, — I demand that you shall speak out," said Boynton.

"I 'm *goin'* to speak out, now," returned Humphrey more steadily, "and it ain't for anything that Friend Harris said, although I think ye 'd ought to know what he did say."

"Who is Harris?" asked Boynton.

"He 's the landlord of the Elm Tahvern."

"What does he say?"

"Well," said Humphrey, with reluctance, "I think ye 'd ought to know. He says you wa'n't sober that mornin' at his house, and he could n't hardly git ye out." Humphrey turned very red, as if ashamed, and wiped his forehead with his napkin; Elihu and the brothers near him looked down, and a painful hush prevailed.

Boynton did not deign to notice this accusation.

"And what does your friend Harris say of the occurrences attending our departure?" he demanded, contemptuously.

"He ain't no friend of our'n, except in the scriptural sense," replied Humphrey, doggedly. "But he says the' wa'n't no occurrences. Just a flash of tol'ble sharp lightnin' and that 's all. The' wa'n't no raps, nor no liftin' o' table-tops, accordin' to his say."

"I am glad to have you so explicit," said the doctor, "and I think now I begin to understand the value of your family's generosity towards myself. Did your friend Harris say anything in aspersion of my daughter?"

"Nay," replied Humphrey.

"Then she probably remains as before in your estimation, and you would take her word against Harris's, highly as you value his testimony?"

"Nay, we don't value his testimony," interposed Elihu. "Your word is better than his. We believe you against him."

Boynton waved scornful rejection with his hand. "Oh, spare your flatteries, sir. *I* know what you think of *me*. But you would believe my daughter?"

"Yee, we would," answered the whole audience.

The doctor regarded them with a curling lip. "Egeria," he said quietly, "state to these people what occurred. Tell the truth." The girl was silent. "Speak!"

"Father!" she gasped, "I don't know. I have

heard you say. But I was asleep and dreaming till that clap of thunder came."

"Then you remember nothing?"

"Oh, I can just remember our going into that house, and our coming out of it. I forgot everything, — I was beginning to be crazy with the fever. But don't mind, — oh, don't mind, father! They believe you, — they said they did. Oh, you *do* believe him, don't you?" she implored of all those faces that swam on her tears.

Boynton reeled, and again the compassionate brother started up to save him from a fall. "Don't touch me!" he cried harshly. "Is there anything else?" he demanded, turning to Humphrey.

Elihu rose with an air of authority. "This must stop now. It has been a painful season; but no one here thinks that these friends have done anything wrong, or said anything false. We believe them, and we welcome them, if they choose, to stay with us."

"Yee, we do!" The assenting voices included Humphrey's.

"You welcome us to stay amongst you!" cried the doctor, with intense disdain. "Do you think that after what has just passed here any earthly consideration could induce me to remain another day, another hour, under your roof?" He had his daughter's hand in his arm, and he proudly pressed it as he spoke, drawing himself to his full height. "So much for ourselves! As for the experiments in which we have so ignominiously failed, I have

no personal regrets. It would have been a pitiful triumph at best, if we had succeeded before you, and I cannot believe that the principle, the truth, involved can suffer by our defeat. We are simply proved unfit means for its development, — nothing more. Were it otherwise, were I persuaded that our humiliation was destined to arrest, or more than slightly retard, the progress of this science in men's minds, then I should indeed regard this night as the blackest of my life, and should be ready to lay down that life in despair. But, no! It is not given to any one weak instrument, mysteriously breaking in the presence of a few obscure and sordid intelligences, to obstruct the divine intention. In this ineradicable conviction, I bid you a final farewell."

He strode toward the door with his daughter on his arm. One of the elders said, meekly and sadly, "The meeting is dismissed," and the brethren and sisters dispersed to their different houses. Those of the office found themselves following Dr. Boynton thither. They apprehensively entered after him, dreading some fresh explosion, or some show of preparation for instant departure. But the rhetoric of his spectacular adieu had sufficed him for the present. He merely said, "Egeria, go to bed. You must be quite worn out. As for me, I can't sleep, yet. I will go out for a walk. Would you oblige me with a glass of water?" he asked politely, turning to Sister Frances. When she brought it, "Thanks," he said, and handed back the empty goblet with a bow.

"Do you think you'd better walk far?" tremulously asked Egeria.

The touch of opposition restored him to his sense of wrong and resentment.

"Go to bed, Egeria," he said severely, "and don't any one sit up for me. I can let myself in at the side door when I wish to return."

He started away, but the girl put herself in his path to the door. "Oh, father! You won't go to see that man at the tavern, will you? Tell me you won't, or I can't let you go."

"Don't be ridiculous!" cried her father. "I have no idea of going to meet that ruffian. In due time I shall call him to account."

"Don't ye think, Friend Boynton," said Humphrey, with awkward kindliness, "that you'd better try to get some rest?"

In the swift evanescence and recurrence of his moods under the strong excitement, Boynton was like a drunken man. After publishing his resolution not to accept the hospitality of the Shakers for an hour more, he had walked passively to the office with them, and had bidden Egeria go to bed there, as if nothing had happened. At Humphrey's words, all his indignation was rekindled.

"Rest! No, sir! I will *not* try to get some rest. After what has passed, every offer of kindness from you is a fresh offense. You, Egeria, if you can close your eyes here, you are welcome. Doubtless you can. Your apathy, your total want of sympathetic response to my feelings and my will,

may enable you to do so. But till some other roof shall cover us, I want no shelter."

No one sought to detain him, now, and going quickly from the door he left them huddled in a blank and purposeless group together.

"Poor thing!" said Sister Frances, first breaking the silence, as she turned to Egeria. "Oh, poor child!" She tried to take the girl in her arms; but with a pathetic "Don't!" Egeria prevented her, and averted her quivering face. She went out of the room and up-stairs without a word or sound; but Frances creeping softly after, to listen at her door, heard her sobbing within the room.

XVI.

THE hot weather, with here and there a blazing day in June, flamed into whole weeks of unbroken heat before the middle of July. The business streets were observably quieter, and the fashionable quarters were solitudes. At the club windows a few elderly men sat in arm-chairs, with glasses of iced Apollinaris water at their elbows, and stared out on the Common; some young men, with their hats on (if they perished for it), stalked spectrally from room to room behind them. The imported *bonnes* with their charges no longer frequented the Public Garden; it was thronged with the children and the superannuated of the poor, and with groups of tourists from the South and West, who were finding Boston what so many natives boast it in winter, the most comfortable summer resort on the coast.

It was not Ford's habit to go out of town at all; for in his hatred of the narrow and importunate conditions of the village life which he had left behind him with his earlier youth, he had become an impassioned cockney.

"If you are so bitter against the country," said Phillips, who was urging an invitation to the sea-

side upon him, "why don't you try really to be of the town as well as in it? Why don't you try to be one of us? Why don't you make an effort to fit in?"

"I don't like fitting in; I like elbow-room," answered Ford. "Do you suppose I should be fond of the town if I were of it? I should have to be one of a set, and a set is a village. If I am in the town, but not of it, I have freedom and seclusion. Besides, no man of simple social traditions like mine fits into a complex society without a loss of self-respect. He must hold aloof, or commit insincerities, — be a snob. I prefer to hold aloof. It is n't hard."

"And you don't think you do it to make yourself interesting?" inquired Phillips.

"I think not," said Ford.

"People would as lief be pleasant to you as not. But it ends there. They 're not anxious about you," suggested the other.

"I believe I understand that." Ford was sitting at his window in his deep easy-chair; and he had his coat off. "That 's what galls my peasant-pride. Suppose I went with you to this lady's house" — he touched with the stem of his pipe a letter which lay open on the table pulled near him — "and visited among your friends, the nobility and gentry; I should be reminded by a thousand things every day that I was a sham and a pretender. That kind of people always take it for granted that you feel and think with them; and I don't. You can't keep

telling them so, however. And suppose I tried to conform: I should be an amateur among professionals. They have the habit of breeding and of elegance, as they understand it; I may have a loftier ideal, but I have n't discipline; I can't realize my ideal; and they do realize theirs, — poor souls! That makes me their inferior; that makes me hate them."

"Oh," said Phillips, "you can put an ironical face on it, but I suspect what you say is really your mind."

"Of course it is. At heart I am a prince in disguise; but your friends won't know it if I sit with my coat off. That would vex me." He took up the letter from the table, and holding it at arm's length admired it. "Such a hand alone is enough; the smallest letters half an inch high, and all of them shrugging their shoulders. I can't come up to that. If I went to this lady's house, to be like her other friends and acquaintance I should have to be just arrived from Europe, or just going; my talk should be of London and Paris and Rome, of the Saturday Review and the Revue des Deux Mondes, of English politics and society; my own country should exist for me on sufferance through a compassionate curiosity, half repulsion; I ought to have recently dined at Newport with poor Lord and Lady Scamperton, who are finding the climate so terrible; and I should be expected to speak of persons of the highest social distinction by their first names, or the first syllables of their first names. You see,

that 's quite beyond me. 'And do bring your friend, Mr. Ford,' " he read from the letter mincingly, and laughed. " I leave it to your fertile invention to excuse me, Phillips."

He kindled his pipe, and Phillips presently went away. It was part of his routine not to fix himself in any summer resort, but to keep accessible to the invitations which did not fail him. He found his account in this socially, and it did not remain unsaid that he also gratified a passion for economy in it; but the people who said this continued among his hosts. Late in the summer, or almost when the leaves began to turn, he went away to the hills for a fortnight or three weeks, providing himself with quarters in some small hotel, and making a point of returning to the simplicity of nature. In the performance of this rite he wore a straw hat and a flannel shirt, and he took walks in the woods with the youngest young ladies among the boarders.

The intervals between his visits he spent in town, where he was very comfortable. When he went to the places that desired him, he explained that he had been in Boston trying to get Ford away. " Oh, yes! Your odd friend," said the ladies driving him home from the station in their phaetons. Phillips must have known that they did not care either for his odd friend or for his own oddity in having him, and yet he rather prized this eccentricity in himself.

The people in Ford's boarding-house went their different ways. Mrs. Perham remained latest, for

Mr. Perham's health had not yet allowed his removal. He had had two great passions in life: making money and driving horses. By the time he had made his money he had a touch of paralysis, and could no longer drive horses. This separated him much from his wife, who liked almost as well as he to ride after a good horse (as it is expressed by people who like it), and whom, since she had been forced so much to books for amusement, he could not join. She read the newspapers to him, and she went with him to the theatres; but there they ceased to sympathize in their tastes, for she was not fond of swearing, and it was this resource which remained to Mr. Perham after the papers and the play.

The house filled up for the summer with those people from the West and South who found the summer in Boston so pleasant, and with other transients; but many of the rooms and many of the places at the table remained vacant, and Mrs. Perham and Ford looked at each other across long distances, empty, or populated only by strange faces. At last Mr. Perham was able to bear removal; his wife seized the occasion and hurried him away to the country. That left Ford alone with the strangers, and he rather missed the woman's hungry curiosity, her cheerfulness, and her indomitable patience under what a more sympathetic witness might have felt to be the hard conditions of her life. He clung to the town throughout July and far into August, with a growing restlessness. He

did not care for the heat, and he amused himself well enough when he found time to be amused. He made a point of studying the different excursions in the harbor and beyond it; he studied also the entertainments offered at the theatres, where the variety combinations inculcated in small audiences a morality as relaxed as their systems.

One Sunday he went to the spiritualist meeting in the grove by Walden Pond. Most of the spiritualists were at a camp-meeting of their sect further up the road, and the people whom he met seemed, like himself, vaguely curious. They were nearly all country-folk: the young men had come with their sweethearts for pleasure; there were middle-aged husbands and wives who had brought their children for a day in the woods beside the pretty lake. Their horses were tied to the young pines and oaks; they sat in their buggies and carryalls, which were pushed into cool and breezy spots. The scene brought back to Ford the Sunday-school picnics of his childhood, but here was a profaner flavor: scraps of newspaper that had wrapped lunches blew about the grounds; at one place a man had swung a hammock, and lay in it reading, in his shirt-sleeves; on the pond was a fleet of gay row-boats, which, however, the railroad company would not allow to be hired on Sunday. Ford found the keeper of the floating bath-houses and got a bath. When he came out the man, with American splendor, refused to take any money; he said that they did not let the baths on Sunday, but when he saw

a gentleman he liked to treat him as one. "I hope you 're not mistaken in my case," said Ford sadly; and the bath-man laughed, and said he would chance it. Another of the people in charge complained of the dullness of the place. "What you want is a band. You want a dance-hall in the middle of the pond, here; and you want a band." They pointed out the auditorium in a hollow of the hills beyond the railroad track, where at the hour fixed for service he found the sparse company assembled. A score of listeners were scattered over the seats in the middle of the pavilion; outside, two young fellows who had come by the train leaned against the columns and smoked, with their hats on; a young girl in blue, with her lover, conspicuously occupied one of the seats under the trees that scaled the amphitheatre, worn grassless and brown by drought and the feet of many picnics; there were certain ladies in artificial teeth and long linen dusters whom Ford fixed upon as spiritualists, though he had no reason to do so. A trance-speaker was announced for the Invocation; he came forward, where the fiddlers sat when there was dancing, and, supporting himself by one hand on the music-stand, closed his eyes and passed into a trance of wandering rhetoric, returning to himself in a dribble of verse which bade the hearer, at the close of each stanza,

"Come, then, come to Spirit-Land."

The address was given by another speaker, who declaimed against the injustice of the world towards spiritualism and boasted of the importance of its

Unfoldments. He sketched its rise and progress, and found an analogy between the "first lisping of the tinny rap at Rochester" and the advent of Christ, whom he described as the "infant Reformer in the man-ger," and again as our "humble elder brother." The people listened decently, and but for the young fellows with their cigars were as respectful as most country congregations to what was much duller than most country preaching. Ford came away before the end, and climbing the side of the amphitheatre encountered Mr. Eccles, who was also about to go. He shook hands with Ford, and on his present inquiry said that nothing had been heard of the Boyntons since the spring. He expressed a faded interest in them. He asked Ford if he had seen the experiments in self-expansion and compression of the new medium, Mrs. Sims. He viewed these experiments as the ultimation of certain moral fluctuations in the spiritual world, for if there was a steady movement either outward or inward in that world, Mrs. Sims might expand or might condense herself, but it stood to reason that she could not do both.

Ford came home with a headache; when he woke, the next morning, the long window danced round the room before it settled to its proper place. He was not in the habit of being sick, and he suffered some days with this dizziness before he saw a doctor. Then he asked advice, because the sickness interfered with his work.

"Go away somewhere," said the doctor. "It 's indigestion. Get a change of air."

"Do you mean the sea-side?" asked Ford.

"I don't call that a change of air from Boston. Go to the hills."

Ford reflected a moment in disgust. He could have endured the sea-side. "Any particular direction?"

"No. Go anywhere. Go to the White Mountains. Take a tramp through them."

"I 'd rather take medicine," said Ford. "Give me some medicine."

"Oh, I 'll give you all the *medicine* you want," said the doctor; and he wrote him a prescription.

Ford went home, and took his medicine with the same skepticism, and tried to keep about his work. The lectures which he had been attending were over long ago; but he had found a chance to do some study with a practical chemist which he was loath to forego; and he had his pot-boiling for the press. But his mind feebly relaxed from the demands upon it, and at last it refused to respond at all. He lingered a week longer in town before he would suffer himself to act upon the doctor's advice, and when at last he forced himself to submission it was the end of the month. As regarded such matters he was a man of small invention, and he was at a loss how to go, when he had made up his mind to it. He would have been glad of Phillips's determining counsel, but the time had now come for Phillips's annual return to nature, and he would be far from Boston and the North Shore. On his way to buy a Guide, Ford saw in the win-

dow of a railroad agency the advertisement of a route to the White Mountains, and he advised with the ticket-agent, who took no more interest in the matter than Ford himself, about getting a ticket over his line. It led first to Portland, and then, as the agent indifferently pointed out on the map, went straight to the mountains, with a bold, broad sweep, while rival routes, in spidery crooks, zigzagged thither with a preposterous, almost wanton, indirectness. Ford stood sadly amusing himself, first with the immense advantage of this line over all competitors, and then with the names of the towns near Gorham in New Hampshire, and in the adjoining region of Maine: Milan, Berlin, Success, Byron, Madrid, Avon, New Vineyard, Peru, Norway, Sweden, Industry, Paris, Carthage, — names conjecturably given at hap-hazard, or in despair, or out of humorous recklessness, as names are given to dogs and horses. He wondered whether Dr. Boynton came from Byron or Carthage, or perhaps a little farther off, from Cornville or Solon. He stood so long before the map that the agent lost his patience, and turned to his books; and Ford came away at last without buying a ticket.

At home he found a visitor whom his sick and dazzled eyes identified after a while as Phillips. "Hallo!" he said. "I thought you were somewhere in the country."

"Theoretically I am in the country," Phillips admitted, "but practically 'I am here,' — as Ruy Blas says." He neatly imitated the accent of the

late Charles Fechter in pronouncing the words. "It occurred to me, before committing myself to the country irretrievably, that I would stop in Boston and try to commit you with me."

"Who told you I was sick?" asked Ford, with displeasure.

"Nobody. If I knew it, I divined it. If you are sick, so much the better. My plan is just the thing for you. I am going to drive in a buggy to Brattleboro', where I underwent the water cure — for my first passion. It was a great while ago. I want you to come, too."

Ford shook his head stupidly. "The doctor said the White Mountains."

"Yes, White Mountains, Green Mountains; it 's all one. It 's air that you 're after. All you want is change of air. This journey will make another man of you. It 's to be a journey for the sake of going and coming; and we will loiter or hurry on the way, just as we like. Come! I 've planned it all out. It 's to be an affair of weeks. I propose to make it an exploration, — a voyage of discovery. I wish to form the acquaintance of my native State, and of those men and brethren, her children, who have never left the domestic hearth. You had better come. It will be literary material to you, and money in your pocket. I thought of striking for Egerton, and looking in on the Perhams there, first; but we ought to stop on our way at Sudbury to see the Wayside Inn; and I must deflect a little to show you Concord, and the local history and

philosophy; there are Shakers and all sorts of novelties at Vardley and Harshire; beyond Egerton is Princeton, with its Wachusett Mountain; and after that there is anything northwestwardly that you like; I have n't the map by me. My mare is pining on the second floor of her stable, and would ask nothing better than to form a third in our party."

"Oh, I 'll go with you," said Ford listlessly.

"Good!" cried Phillips. "This is the fire of youth. If we get sick of it, we can send the mare back from any given point, and take to the rails. That is one of the advantages of having rails. It makes travel by the country roads a luxury, and not a necessary. I fancy we shall feel almost wicked in the pursuit of our journey, — it will be such unalloyed pleasure."

Phillips's mare was the remains of an establishment which he had set up some years before. It had included a man and a coupé, and he had relinquished these because of their expensiveness. The man, especially, had been unable to combine the advantages of outside man and inside man; he made Phillips's lodgings smell of the mare, and he made the stable smell of Phillips's wine. The man was paid off and sent away, and the coupé was sold at auction; but with a conservative unthrift that curiously combined with his frugal instincts, Phillips had suffered the mare to linger on his hands. Sometimes he took her out for exercise from the club stable, where he had lodged her; but he had intervals of forgetfulness, in which the club-groom

found it his duty to warn him that the mare's legs were swelling. She was consequently boarded out of town a good deal, and Phillips awoke to her possession only when the farmers' bills came in. At these times he said he should sell that mare.

Like men who are rarely out of sorts, Ford was eager to be well at once, and he chafed under Phillips's delays in getting off. But the latter, having secured Ford's company, began to arrange the details of their journey with minuteness, and it was several days before they started. Their progress had then even more than the promised slowness. Phillips was intent not only upon the pleasure of the journey, but also upon the search for colonial bricabrac, and this began as soon as they struck the real country beyond the suburban villages. All that was colonial was to his purpose, from tall standing clocks to the coarsest cracked blue delft: spinning-wheels, andirons, shovels and tongs, claw-footed furniture, battered pewter plates, door-latches and door-knockers, tin lanterns, fiddle-back chairs — his craze generously embraced them all. He did not buy much, but he talked as long over what he left as what he took. He was not the first connoisseur who had visited these farm houses; the people sometimes knew the worth of their wares; in certain cases, he traced the earlier presence of rival collectors whom he knew. Ford had nothing to do but to note the growth of the bargaining passion in the wary farm-wives. There were some who would sell nothing, and some had nothing they would not

sell, and they asked too much or too little with the same simplicity. What most struck him was the entire rusticity of their thought and life. Off the lines of railroad, and out of the localities frequented by summer boarders, the people were as rural, within fifteen or twenty miles of Boston, as they would have been among the Vermont or New Hampshire hills. But the country was itself occasionally very wild, especially as they got southward in Sudbury, among overflowed meadows and long stretches of solitary pine woods. The sparse farmhouses and the lonesome villages afflicted him with the remembrance of his own youth; whatever his life had been since, it had not been embittered with the sense of hopeless endeavor, with the galled pride, with the angry ambition, which had once made it a torment in such places. But when they chanced upon some bit of absolute wilderness his heart relented towards the country; his jealous spirit found no more intrusion there than in the town; and he liked the wild odors, the tangle of vegetation, the life of the sylvan things. A hawk winging to covert under the avenging pursuit of small birds, a woodchuck lumpishly skurrying across an open field, the chase of chipmucks and squirrels along the walls, were sights that touched a remote and deep tenderness in his breast. As they drew near the old inn, which was the first monument Phillips had proposed to inspect, it was late in the afternoon, and the landscape grew more consolingly savage. No other house was near enough to

be seen, and they approached the storied mansion through a long stretch of pine and sand, by a road which must be lonelier now than it was a hundred years ago. They dismounted under the elm before the vast yellow hostelry, and explored its rambling chambers: they saw Lafayette's room and Washington's room; the attic for the slaves and common folk; the quaint ball-room; the bar; the parlor where Longfellow and his friends used to sit before the fire that forever warms the rhyme celebrating the Wayside Inn. They found it not an inn any more, though it appeared from the assent of the tenant that they might command an elusive hospitality for the night. The back-door opened upon the fading memories of a garden, and the damp of late rains struck from it into the sad old house.

"It would be delightful," Phillips said, "to stay, but I think we must push on to Sudbury for the night." He lingered over an old chest of drawers in the dining-room; not claw-footed, certainly, but with a bulging front, and with some fragmentary relics of its former brasses. But, "It has carried antiquity to the point where it ceases to be a virtue," he sighed at last. "It might be re-created; it could n't be restored."

At Sudbury Village they found that there was no inn; though provision was occasionally made for wayfarers at the outlying farm-houses. They could be lodged in that way, or they could return for the night to the tavern at Wayland where they had dined. It was now twilight. "I think it will

give an agreeable flavor of hardship to our adventure if we push on to Concord," said Phillips, and Ford willingly consented. They were no better assorted than ever in their strange companionship; but they had a good deal of talk. Phillips was volubly philosophical; and Ford, under the stimulus of the novelty, was more than commonly responsive, and pointed his comment, as was very unusual in him, with bits of his own history and observation. But the next day, after looking over Concord together, and making their start upon an early dinner, they had almost as little to say to each other as the tramps they met on the road, who had the air of not wishing to be disturbed in their meditations upon burglary and arson. They gave up their plan of stopping over night with the Harshire Shakers, and pushed on as far as Vardley instead, where they trusted to finding shelter in the community. They could spend the next morning there, Phillips said, and dine at Egerton; and Ford assented to anything.

XVII.

Boynton had passed the night wandering up and down the roads, and trying to puzzle out the causes of his discomfiture. Towards morning he had gone as far as the Elm Tavern and walked to and fro before it a long time, debating whether he should go in and confront the landlord with his lie. The house was brilliantly lighted upon one side, where there seemed to be a hall running its whole length, and a sound of clattering feet and laughing voices, mingled with the half-suppressed squeak of a fiddle, came out of the open windows. It was the landlord who was fiddling; Boynton recognized his tones in the harsh voice that called out the figures of the dance. From time to time a panting couple came to the door for breath. Several women came together, presently, and catching sight of Boynton, as he lurked in the shadow of the elms, one of them called out, "Lord, girls, there 's a ghost!" and they all fled in-doors again with hysterical cries and laughter. The word thrilled him with hope: what he had declared in regard to the phenomena there must be matter of general belief in the neighborhood. He stole away, borne forward as if on air by the tumult of cogitation that

inflated his brain. He found himself, he knew not how, again on the long street of the Shaker village. The day was breaking, when he sat down near the granite bowl, still struggling hopefully for a clue to the mystery of his failure. His waking dreams began to mix with those of sleep, and an hour later Ford and Phillips, roused by a common foreboding of early breakfast, and strolling down the road a little for a glimpse of the village and a breath of the fresh morning air, halted at sight of this strange figure, clothed in Shaker habiliments, and with the broad-brimmed Shaker hat on the grass at its feet; the eyes were closed, and the head rested against the trunk of one of the willows. A chilly horror crept over Ford, who whispered, "Is he dead?" but Phillips had no emotion save utter astonishment.

"Great heavens!" he cried. "It 's Dr. Boynton!"

At the sound of his name, Boynton opened his eyes with a start, and sprang to his feet. He recognized them instantly, but he took no heed of Phillips as he launched himself upon Ford.

"You here! You here! You here!" he screamed. "Now I understand! Now I see! Where were you last night? Were you in this place, this neighborhood, this region? I see it! I know why we failed, — why we were put to shame, destroyed, annihilated, in the very hour of our triumph! I might have thought of it! I might have known you were here! Did you hunt

us up? Did you follow us? You have ruined me! You have blasted my life!"

With whatever wild impulse, he caught at Ford's throat, and clung to his collar, while the young man's iron clutch tightened upon either of his wrists.

"Let go, you maniac! If you don't let go, I 'll" —

Boynton flung up his hands, and reeling several steps backward, fell. He struck heavily against the sharp rim of the stone bowl, and seemed about to fall into the water, but dropped at the base, motionless.

"My God, you 've killed him!" shouted Phillips, as he stepped out from behind one of the trees.

"Go and get help!" Ford fell on his knees beside Boynton, and searched his breast with a trembling hand for the beating of his heart; he put his ear to his mouth, and heard him breathe before he dipped his hand in the bowl, and dashed Boynton's face with the water. He was kneeling beside him, and lifting his head upon his arm, when he looked up and saw the anxious visages of those whom Phillips's clamors had summoned about them. Then Egeria had made her way through the circle. She pushed Ford away with an awful look and stooping over her father caught up his head in her arms, and now swiftly scanned his face, and now swiftly pressed it against her breast, in those shuddering impulses with which a mother will see and will not see if her child be hurt.

The Shakers pushed a wagon down to the place where Boynton lay, and Ford afterward remembered helping to lift him into it.

"I 'm glad you did n't strike him; I thought at first you had," said Phillips, as they followed the wagon back to the village.

"So did I," said Ford, mentally struggling to realize what had happened.

"What are they going to do, I wonder?" resumed Phillips, looking about him. "They ought to send for a doctor."

"Yee," said a Shaker at his elbow, whom neither of them had noticed, "we have sent."

The doctor came quickly; and Boynton, whom they had got into the infirmary upon the bed where Egeria had lain sick, began to show signs of consciousness. From time to time, scraps of hopeful report were passed through the group outside to Ford and Phillips on its skirts. When the doctor reappeared at last from within the infirmary, the brothers and sisters by twos and threes waylaid him in the yard and the street with anxious demand. The young men walking apart ambushed him farther down the road.

"It 's a faint — I can't tell what it 's complicated with. He received some contusions in his fall — about the head. He 's an elderly man. He 's stout."

"Do you mean that he 's in danger?" Ford asked.

"Well, these apoplectic seizures are serious things for any one after thirty. Still it 's a slight attack

— comparatively. The contusions — I 'm obliged to leave him for another patient just now. I shall be back again directly. Which of you is Mr. Ford?"

"My name is Ford."

"He wanted to know where you were. You a friend of his?"

"No. I met him in Boston this spring."

"Know his friends?"

"I don't."

"Get up!" said the doctor to his horse.

"If we knew any of his people," said Phillips, "I suppose we ought to telegraph."

"Yes," assented Ford.

"But, as we don't know them," continued Phillips, "what are we going to do?"

"I can't say." When they reached the office on their walk back, Ford went in, and left Phillips to get their horse put to. In a little while he came out again, and said abruptly, "I 'm going to stay here. I can't say that I am responsible for the misfortunes of this man, but somehow I am entangled with him, and I can't break away without playing the brute. I 've been talking with these people about Boynton. He 's been trying some of his experiments here, and has failed. The thing happened last night, and I suppose that when he saw me, this morning, his mind recurred to his old delusion that I had something to do with his failure."

"I imagined as much," said Phillips, "from a remark that he made."

Ford frowned at the levity, and then continued. "That 's all. I 've explained to their head men, here, as well as I could, what relation he fancied I had to him, and they understood it better than I could have expected; they 've seen enough of him to understand that his superstition about me would account for the assault. I 'm not bound to respect his mania, but I don't see how I can leave till I know how it goes with him." Phillips shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing. "The Shakers tell me that I can be lodged at a house of theirs down the road here. I must stay, and be of what use I can, though I don't *know* what. I 'll come away when I can do so decently."

"Oh, if you 're going in for decency," said Phillips, "I 've nothing to say. But that sort of thing can be carried too far, you know. Do you really mean it?"

"Yes."

"Then there 's nothing for me to say. But what do you expect me to do?" he asked, glancing at the horse, which was now brought up.

"I expect you to go on. There 's no reason why you should stay."

"No, I can't see how I 'm involved. And it 's a brisk drive to Egerton, — and breakfast. There 's no prospect of breakfast here, I suppose," he said, looking wistfully at the office windows. "Well; if you 've made up your mind, I shall be off at once. I 'm sorry for our excursion."

"Yes, it 's a pity for that," said Ford.

"It promised everything. Perhaps you could join me at Egerton, to-morrow?"

"Yes; if I can."

"I 'll give you a day's grace. Then I shall push on to Brattleboro', and perhaps drop down this way with the falling leaf. I wish you 'd write to me at Brattleboro', and let me know how the doctor gets on."

They shook hands. Ford pulled his bag out of the back of his wagon; and as Phillips drove off, he set out under the guidance of one of the brothers, to find his quarters in the house of which he had spoken. It had been the dwelling of a family of Shakers, which in the decay of their numbers was absorbed into the other branches of the community, and it stood half a mile away from the office, quite empty, but kept in perfect neatness and repair. He was given his choice of its many dormitories, but he preferred to have his bed set up in the meeting-room, which opened by folding-doors into an ante-room as large, and thus extended the whole length of the building. It was low ceiled, but cool currents of air swept through it from the windows at either end, and it was a still haven of refuge from the heat by night and by day. Hardly a fly sang in its expanse, dimmed by the shade of the elms before it; and it was indescribably remote from noise. The passing even of an ox-cart on the street before it was hushed by the thick bed of sand that silenced the road-way; and the heavy voice of the driver in hawing and geeing came like

some lulling sound of animal life. A tenant of the Shakers lived in a farm-house across the way, and his wife had agreed to give Ford his meals and bestow what care his room needed; but these people were childless, and except for the plaintive lament of their broods of young turkeys pursuing the grasshoppers through the ranks of sweet-corn, their presence involved hardly an interruption of the quiet.

Ford hung up some clothes in a closet, and after a hurried breakfast went again to the office. He found Boynton's doctor there with Humphrey and the sisters, and presently Egeria came in from another room with a slip of paper in her hand; her eyes were swollen with weeping, but she said in a low, steady voice, "This is grandfather's address."

"I don't want you to feel," said the doctor, "that the case is immediately alarming. There is no *necessity* for your grandfather's coming" —

"Oh, no! But I know that he would like to be told." She gave the slip of paper to Humphrey, and without looking at Ford went out at the door, and he saw her cross the street to the infirmary. There was some talk as to how this dispatch should be sent, and Ford said he was going over to the village, and would carry it to the operator at the station. Outside, the doctor beckoned to him from his buggy, and said, "He has asked again if you were here. If he wishes to see you, you had better let him. Humphrey has told me what you explained to him. You can humor a sick man's whim, I suppose."

Ford really had another errand at Vardley; he wanted some ink and paper; for if he were to remain he must set to work as soon as possible. It was noon before he returned. With the lapse of time, that working mind, of which the operations are so obscure and incalculable, had unconsciously arranged its material in him, and when he sat down in his strange lodging he was able to put it all on paper, in spite of the remote, dull ache of anxiety which accompanied his writing.

His tea was ready by the time the work was done, but with the revival of his restlessness, upon the conclusion of his task and the release of the faculties devoted to it, he slighted the meal, and hastily started with his copy to the post-office.

He was met there by the telegraph operator, who asked him to carry back to the Shakers the reply to the telegram he had sent. He saw that he must be already identified with the Boyntons in the village gossip; but he did not observe the kindly interest expressed in some words dropped by the operator, as he put the dispatch into his pocket, and walked away with it.

There was a light in Humphrey's room at the office when he returned, and he carried the telegram in to him, and waited while the Shaker brought his lamp to bear upon the sheet. Humphrey remained reading it as if it were a long, closely-written letter.

"You don't know what it says?" he asked at last, looking up over his spectacles.

"Why, no," said Ford. "I had no authority to open it."

"I thought may be the telegrapher might told ye. It appears as if Friend Boynton's father-in-law had been dead two months."

The dispatch, which Humphrey handed to Ford, was signed by "Rev. Frederick Armstrong," who promised that he "would write."

"I suppose," said Humphrey, "it 's the minister."

"I suppose so," Ford admitted absently. He came to himself to ask, "What 's to be done?"

Humphrey scratched his head. "I d' know as I 'm rightly prepared to say. You don't know nothin' about Friend Boynton's other folks, do ye?"

"No," said Ford.

Another silence followed. "Seems to come kind o' hard, right on top of the *other* Providence," mused Humphrey, aloud. "Would it be your judgment to tell 'em?"

"Really, I don't know," said Ford, quite unable to shake off his sterile dismay.

"You don't feel," suggested Humphrey, "as if you 'd like to break the news to 'em?"

"I doubt," answered Ford, glad to be able to lay hold of any idea, "whether Dr. Boynton is in a condition to know even that we 've telegraphed, much less what the answer is."

"Yee," assented Humphrey, "that is so. Then it comes to tellin' Egery. If you was an old friend of the family" —

"I 'm not," said Ford. "I told you that I saw them for the first time in Boston, this spring. Why need you say anything at all?"

"Why," returned Humphrey, with a gleam of hope, "I s'pose, if she asks, we 'll have to."

"She may not ask at once. Don't speak till she does."

"That 's so," mused Humphrey. "It could be done that way. I d' know as anybody could say they was deceived, either."

"Certainly not."

Humphrey put the telegram into a drawer and turned the key upon it. "She can have it when she asks for it," he said doggedly, like a man who has made up his mind to accept the consequences of his transgression.

Ford drew a long breath; a little time had been gained, at any rate. "Can I be of any use over there to-night?" he asked, nodding his head in the direction of the infirmary. "Have you watchers?"

"Yee: Laban 's settin' up with him, to-night; and Frances is there with Egery."

"If he asks for me," said Ford, "I should like you to call me at any hour."

He went out, and walked down the dark, silent road to his strange domicile. Hearing him approach, the farmer came across the road, and opened the door for him, and gave him matches to light his lamp. He found his way to his vast chamber; but after he had blown out his light, it was long before he slept.

XVIII.

THE next morning, while Ford sat, after breakfast, at his writing-table, trying to put his mind upon his work, one of the little Shaker boys came to say that Friend Boynton wished to see him. He obeyed the summons with a stricture at the heart. The boy could not say whether Boynton was better or worse, but Ford conceived that he was called in a final moment. He had never seen any one die, and all through his childhood and his earlier youth the thought of death had been agony to him, probably because it was related to fears of the life after death, which survived in his blood after they ceased to be part of his belief. The confirmed health of his adolescence, as well as his accepted theories of existence, had now for years quieted these fears. The sleep and the forgetting which the future had been reasoned so clearly to be could not be terrible to any man of good health, and in the rare moments in which he lifted his mind from the claims of duty here it reposed tranquilly enough in the logical refuge of nullity provided for it. Annihilation was not dreadful, but the instant preceding it, the last breath of consciousness, in which his personality should be called to cease, to release its strong clutch

upon reality, might contain a spiritual anguish, to which an eternity of theologically fancied pangs were nothing. He did not shrink from the consequences of his own mental position; there could be no consequences of belief or disbelief; but he was cold with the thought of confronting the image of his own dissolution in another. Life was not a good, he knew that; but he felt now that it was something, and beyond it there was not even evil. He touched first the swelling muscle of one arm, and then of the other; he laid his hand upon the trunk of a large maple as he passed; he swept the sky with a glance; he smiled to find himself behaving like a man on his way to execution; if he had himself been about to die, he could not have realized more intensely the preciousness of the existence which was slipping into shadow from the grasp of yonder stricken man.

If his face expressed anything of this dark sympathy when he entered the room where Boynton lay, the sick man did not see it. His doctor was there, seated at the bedside, and Boynton lifted one of the limp hands that lay upon the coverlet and gave it to Ford, saying, with his blandness diluted by physical debility, "You 'll excuse my sending for you, Mr. Ford, but I fancied that you would like to see that I was not in such bad case as I might be."

"You are very good," said Ford, touching his hand, and then taking the chair which the country doctor set for him. The exchange of civilities re-

lieved the tension of his feelings, and he found it no longer possible to regard Boynton with the solemnity with which he had approached him.

"Dr. Wilson and I," Boynton continued, "are treating my case together. By that means we draw the sting of the old proverb about having a fool for one's patient, and we get the benefit of our combined experience. The doctor is inclined to take an optimistic view of my condition, which I don't find myself able to share. I have spent a summer — I may almost say a year — of intense excitements, and I am sure that an obscure affection of the heart with which I was once troubled has made progress." He spoke of it with a courteous lightness and haste, as if not to annoy his listener, while Ford gazed at him dumbly. "I have been anxious to say that I regretted the expressions — the exasperation — into which I was betrayed on first meeting you, the other morning." Dr. Wilson rose. "Ah! Going, doctor?" asked Boynton. "Don't let me send you away. Mr. Ford and I have no confidences to make each other. I am only offering him the reparation which is due between gentlemen where there has been a misunderstanding."

"Thank you," said Dr. Wilson, "I must go, now. I will see you again to-morrow."

"And in the mean time we will continue the same treatment? Good-morning, doctor. Dr. Wilson," he added, when the latter had withdrawn, "is a man of uncommon qualifications for his profession. I have been much pleased with the man-

ner in which he has taken hold of my case, though we could not agree in all points of our diagnosis." Boynton's voice was feeble, and from time to time he paused from weakness; but he was careful as ever to round his sentences and polish his diction. "As I was saying," he continued, "I used certain expressions for which I wish to apologize."

"There is no occasion for that," Ford began.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, but there is!" retorted the other. "My language, even in view of your possible intention of antagonizing me, was ridiculous and unjustifiable; for I ought to have been only too glad of the solution of a painful mystery which your presence afforded me. The fact is," he explained, "I met you yesterday after the entire failure of an experiment in psychology which I had been making here under conditions more favorable than I could expect to recur if I should live a thousand years. The experiment was by no means of an advanced character; it was of the simplest character, — the exhibition of a few of the most ordinary phenomena of animal magnetism, in which mere tyros succeed. The failure dumfounded me. At sight of you, my theory of your opposite control, of the necessary antagonism of your sphere, rushed into my mind, and I yielded to an impulse to resent my failure, when I ought, logically, to have hailed your presence as relief, as rescue from an annihilating despair."

"I am very sorry," Ford began again.

"Not at all, not at all!" cried Boynton. "Was

I right in supposing that you had spent the previous evening in this vicinity?"

"Mr. Phillips and I had slept at the office — you call it?"

"Is it possible!" Boynton lay quiet for a moment, before he added, musingly, "Yes, that might account for it, *if* my premises were correct. But," he continued sadly, "it is impossible to verify them now. Some one else must take up my work at the very point — You here, and under conditions favorable to the most complete and thorough investigation! This question of antagonization could be settled in a manner absolutely final; and here I lie, fettered and manacled!" He heaved a passionate sigh, and Ford, in spite of the fact that he knew himself regarded for the moment as a mere instrumentality, an impersonal force, felt a sharp regret for the overthrow of this absurd dreamer.

"Is there — is there any way in which I can be of use to you, Dr. Boynton?" he asked presently.

Boynton did not reply at once. He moved his head uneasily on the pillow, and weakly knotted his fingers together. Then he said, "Yes, there is. I would rather you transacted the business than any of our good friends here, for I am afraid that it might get from them to my daughter. In fact, I should not know how to communicate with them without alarming her."

He looked beseechingly at Ford, who said, "Well?"

"What are your religious beliefs?"

"I have none," said Ford.

"At your age I had none," rejoined Boynton. "Afterward, in circumstances of great sorrow, I embraced the philosophy of spiritualism, because it promised immediate communion and reunion with the wife I had lost. Neither before nor since that time has my theory admitted the necessity of certain — certain — formalities to which the Christian world attaches importance. But the influence of early teachings is very strong, and I cannot resist an inclination — It is entirely illogical, upon either hypothesis, I know! If there is no life hereafter, then it is of no consequence whatever whether any reconciliation takes place. If there is a life hereafter, and it is a mere continuation of this, a progress, a development, under certain new conditions, then the reconciliation can take place there as well as here. This is what my reason tells me, and yet I am not at rest. My dear friend, if you were about to die," — the hand which Boynton unexpectedly laid upon Ford's sent a thrill to his heart, — "and you had parted with some one upon terms of mutual injury, what should you wish?"

"I should wish to see him before I died," answered Ford, gravely.

"And make peace with him, — ask and offer forgiveness. Precisely. There is no doubt an element of superstition in the impulse; it seems childish and unreasonable; and yet I cannot help it. What is it? First, be reconciled to thy brother,

. . . agree with thine adversary quickly — I don't remember. My adversary is the father of my child's mother. We quarreled very bitterly, about this — philosophy of mine. I think he used me harshly; but he is an old man, and doubtless I grieved and thwarted him more than I understood. I don't justify myself. I would like to see him again, and ask him to forgive. I wish you would be so good, Mr. Ford, as to telegraph him — there 's an office at Vardley Station — that I am seriously sick, and would like to see him." Ford could not reply, and Boynton took his silence for reluctance. "I hope I have n't asked too much of you?"

"Oh, no! No. What," he contrived to ask, "is your father-in-law's name?" Boynton gave the name and that of the village in which he lived, and Ford mechanically took them down in his note-book. He remained with this in his hand, seated beside the bed, and not knowing what to do; but he rose at last, and murmured something about not losing time, when Egeria entered. He would have passed her with a bow, but the cheery voice of Boynton turned him motionless.

"Egeria," he said, as the girl went up to his bedside, "I have been asking a favor of Mr. Ford, — something that I intended for a surprise and pleasure to you. But I think that the surprise might be too much, — might alarm you, — and I had better not let it be a surprise. Don't you think that if your grandfather knew that I was so disposed he would like to make up our little quarrel? Mr.

Ford is going to telegraph him to come here! There is no occasion for anxiety" —

Egeria turned upon Ford, with swift self-betrayal. "They telegraphed yesterday. Have n't they heard?" Ford glanced at her father in despair, and bent on her a look of compassion that he was conscious became an appeal for her pity. "Oh, what is it?" she cried, quivering under his imploring scrutiny. "Won't he come? Oh, he is harder than I ever believed! Yes, yes! You were right, father; I will never forgive him!"

"I think I had better tell you the truth," Ford said. "Some one must do it. Your grandfather is dead."

A light of relief, almost of joy, shone in her face. "Oh! I was afraid — I was afraid — Oh, poor grandfather! How could I think it!" She put up her hands to her face, like a child, and wept with sobs that shook the young man's heart.

"When did he die?" she asked at last.

"Two months ago. The telegram was from the minister. He promised to write."

"Do you hear?" cried Egeria. "He would have come, but — he is dead!"

"Oh!" breathed her father, speaking for the first time, "I am very sorry!"

"And now, *now* do you forgive him?" demanded the girl. "Now" —

"Oh, poor soul! I wanted him to forgive *me*," said Boynton. "Well, well! I must wait."

His daughter dropped on her knees beside his

bed, and hid her face in the coverlet. "Poor grandfather! Poor grandfather!" she moaned. "How could you think he would n't come?" she said, lifting her face. "Do you think now that he was cruel?"

"We quarreled," answered her father. "I was to blame."

"No, you were not to blame," she retorted, with swift revulsion. "You believed you did right, and you never pretended that you did n't. Oh, if you could only have seen each other again!"

"Yes," answered the sick man; "the wish to see him has been heavy on my soul ever since I came to myself."

The word recalled her, and she looked fondly into her father's face. "Oh, father, have I made you feel badly? I am so sorry for grandfather" —

"No, my poor girl! I can sympathize with your feeling about him; I can understand it." He smoothed her hair with his gentle, weak, small hand. "I can understand, and I can approve of your feeling. But don't be troubled. Your grandfather and I will be friends when we meet. It will make little difference *there* what theories or creeds we hold. They cannot separate us."

"Why, father!" exclaimed the girl. "What do you mean? You are not going to die! The doctor said" —

Boynton smiled in recovering himself. "We are all mortal. Dr. Wilson is very hopeful about me. I am not going to die at once."

He took one of her hands while she bent over him. "I had mentioned to our good friend here," he said, indicating Ford, "in requesting him to notify your grandfather, my special reasons for wishing to see him, and some little statement — explanation — was necessary in regard to the terms of our separation. I was saying that I wished they had been different. But in the light of this new fact, does my part really appear worse to you than it did before? You can speak freely; I can bear — I ought even to court — the truth."

The girl threw her arms about his neck. "Father! You never had one selfish thought in it. I know that, and I always knew it. I did n't mean to blame you; I only wanted you to excuse him. Oh, nobody needs excusing but me! I stood up before them all, and denied you. I am the one to blame!"

"No, no," protested her father, "you were true to yourself. In the long run we could have succeeded upon no other conditions. You did right."

"Oh, I did long so to please you! You can't think how hard I tried! But something kept me" — She rose and looked at Ford, the obstruction of whose involuntary presence no effort of his had sufficed to remove, and panted, as if about to make some appeal to him. But her lips could not shape it; a piteous, formless, low cry broke from them, and she ran from the room, leaving him in a frowning daze.

"I hope, my dear sir," said Boynton, "that you

will be able to make allowance for the excitement under which we have been laboring. My daughter's distress on my account, and her affection for her grandfather — But we don't intend to make you the victim of our unhappiness."

"Oh, not at all," said Ford, not knowing what else to say.

"You were very considerate, with regard to me," said Boynton gratefully. "I thank you for your good feeling relative to the telegram. But it is well that I should know the worst at once. In asking your patience for what has just occurred, I am sure that I am only anticipating my daughter's wish. I am by no means as confident as I have been," he added, "that I was correct in my theory of your influence. But you have somehow been strangely involved in our destiny. It is something that I hardly know how to apologize for."

"There is no necessity," said Ford.

"Thanks." The doctor lifted his hand in gratitude, and Ford took it. "Are you comfortable in your quarters? It was a place that I had sometimes thought, under happier auspices, of devoting to my investigations; but now — My dear sir, I appreciate your kindness, your delicacy, in staying!"

Ford made a murmur of civility, and Sister Frances came in. Then, with a parting pressure of the hand which Boynton had kept in his, he went out. He half dreaded to encounter Egeria again, at the outer threshold; but she was not there.

XIX.

They came to those last fervid days to which August often reverts after the shiver that passes over her at the beginning of her second fortnight. The noons were cloudless, and the nights were lit with a moon that hung lightly, like an airy ball, in the sky, whose unfathomable blue the vision must search for the faint stars. The unbroken splendor of these days and nights would be intolerably silent but for the hissing of the grasshoppers in the sun, and the hollow din in which the notes of the crickets sum themselves under the moon. While Ford was busy in the morning he could resist certain influences at work upon him, but at other times he was the prey of a wild restlessness, which he could not charge to his shaken health, for he had begun to grow strong again. He said to himself, as he lay under the sun-smitten pines, or when he walked beneath the maples that broke the glare of the moon on the village street, that he was waiting here for a man to die, and he tried to quell his restlessness with that cold fact. But he was not able to keep Boynton's danger in his thoughts. There was, indeed, a suspense in Boynton's condition for which neither he nor his fellow physician could ac-

count. His mind even grew more vivid under such peril as threatened his body, and in his immunity from pain he was more cheerfully speculative than ever. As the days passed, a curious sort of affectionate confidence grew up between Ford and the fantastic theorist, and the young man listened to his talk with a kindliness which he did not trouble himself to reason. He submitted patiently to the analysis which Boynton made of him and of his metaphysical condition, and heard without a smile certain analogies which he discovered. "Yes," Boynton said, one day, "I find a great similarity of mind and temperament in us. At your age, I thought and felt as you do. There is a fascination, which I can still recognize, in the clean surface which complete negation gives. The refusal of science to believe what it cannot subject to its chemic tests has its sublime side. It is at least absolute devotion to the truth, and it involves martyrdom, like the devotion to any other religion. For it *is* a religion, and you cannot get away from religion. Whether you say, I believe, or whether you say, I do not believe, still you formulate a creed. The question whether we came from the Clam or the Ancient of Days, whether we shall live forever, or rot forever, remains; you cannot put it aside by saying there is no such question. From this vantage-ground of mine — a sick-bed is a vantage-ground — I can see that when I stood where you are I occupied a position not essentially different from that which I assumed afterwards. Light shone on

me from one side, and I cast a shadow in this direction; light shone on me from the other side, and I cast a shadow in that direction. My mistake was to fancy at both times that the shadow was I."

Ford evaded the issue as to the identity of their opinions. He admitted that faith in a second life might nerve a man to greater enterprises here; and that one might not so often flag in the pursuit of truth if the horizon did not shut down so close all round. But he said that we had the comfort of knowing that the work of each was delegated to the whole race, and that whoever failed his work could not fail.

"Ah, don't delude yourself!" cried Boynton. "There is *no* comfort in that. What is the race to you or me? You are the race; I am the race; and no one else of all the myriad atoms of humanity could take up our work and keep it the same work."

"You said, just now," said Ford, with a smile, "that you and I were the same."

"I was wrong," promptly admitted Boynton. "We are not the same, and could not be, to all eternity. But if you accept the hypothesis of a second life, in which the objects of this shall remain dear to us, you establish an infrangible, a perpetual, continuity of endeavor. The man with whom a great idea has its inception becomes a disembodied spirit. By influx from the spirit world to which he goes, he becomes the partner of the man to whom his work falls here; and that man dying enlarges the partnership in his turn, and so on *ad*

infinitum. It must be in this way that civilization is advanced, that the world-reforms are accomplished."

Boynton's eyes shone, and Ford listened with kindly neutrality. On some sides he was compelled to respect Boynton's extraordinary alertness. In many things he was grotesquely ignorant; he was a man of very small literature, and he had the limitations of a country-bred person in his conceptions of the world; but his mind, in the speculations on which it habitually dwelt, had a vast and bold sweep, and his theories sprang up fully formed, under his breath, like those plants which the Japanese conjurer fans to flower in the moment after he has put the seed in the ground.

He tossed his head upon the pillow impatiently. "When I think of those things," he said, "I can hardly wait for the slow process of decay to unfold the truth to me. Perhaps I approached the unseen world with too arrogant a confidence," he continued. "At any rate, I have been found unworthy, and my progress on earth has been arrested forever."

Ford could not withhold the expression of the senseless self-accusal in his heart. "I should be very sorry," he said, "if I had been the means of crossing your purposes."

"You never were willfully so," said Boynton. "Besides, as I told you, I have begun to have my misgivings as to my theory of you. I suspect that I may have exaggerated my daughter's powers;

that they were of a limited nature, terminable by the lapse of time. What do you think," he asked, after a silence, as if willing to break away from these thoughts, "of our Shaker friends? Does their life strike you as the solution of the great difficulty?"

"No," said Ford; "it strikes me as begging the question."

"Yes, so it is," assented Boynton; "so it is, in some views. It is a life for women rather than men."

An indefinable pang seized Ford. "I don't quite understand you. Do you think it is a happy life for a woman?"

"There is *no* happy life for a woman — except as she is happy in suffering for those she loves, and in sacrificing herself to their pleasure, their pride and ambition. The advantage that the world offers her — and it does not always offer that — is her choice in self-sacrifice; the Shakers prescribe it for her."

Ford said nothing for a time, while the pain still rankled. Then he asked, "Don't you think the possible power of choosing is a great advantage? I don't know that as a man I expect to be happy; but I like to make my ventures in unhappiness. It saves me from the folly of accusing fate. If I surrendered myself to Shakerism, I should feel myself a prisoner; I should not run the risk of wounds, but I should have no chance of escape."

"A woman does n't like to fight," replied Boyn-

ton. "Besides, there are no irrevocable vows in Shakerism. When you do not like it you leave it. It is no bad fate for a woman. For most women it would be a beneficent fate."

An image of Egeria in the Shaker garb, with her soft young throat hidden to the chin, and the tight gauze cap imprisoning her beautiful hair, rose in the young man's thought, and would not pass at his willing. It was with something like the relief of waking from an odious dream that he saw the girl enter the room in her usual dress. He involuntarily rose.

She had a spray of sumac in her hand, and she put it lightly beside her father on the bed. The leaves were already deeply tinged with crimson. "Ah, yes," he said, taking it up and holding it before him, "I am glad you found it. I thought I saw it the last time I walked that way; but it was only partly red, then. I had intended to get it for you. After my daughter was sick here, this spring," he added, turning his eyes upon Ford, "she showed a singular predilection during her convalescence for wild flowers. They would n't come fast enough for her; all the family were set to looking for them. Do you remember, Egeria, the day when we got you out under the apple-blossoms? What is the apple-tree like, now? Some yellow leaves on it, here and there?"

"Yes, but the red apples burn like live coals among them," said Egeria.

"Fruition, fruition," murmured her father dream-

ily. "Not so sweet as hope. But autumn was always my favorite season, — my favorite season. I suppose the long grass is limp and the clover-heads are black in the alleys of the orchard. All those aspects of nature — The sumac is first to feel the fall. Have you seen any other red leaves, Egeria?"

"I saw a young maple in the swamp that was almost as red in places as this," said Egeria. "But they were too high to reach."

"Ah," returned her father, "they will soon be red enough everywhere."

"Could n't Miss Boynton tell me where her maple is?" Ford interposed. "I could get you the leaves."

"Oh, no, — no," began the doctor.

"I do a certain amount of walking every day. If Miss Boynton will tell me where the maple is, and begin with the swamp" —

"The swamp," said Egeria, "is just back of the south pasture; but I should have to look for the tree myself."

"Take me with you then," said the young man, with what he thought a great boldness.

"I could do that," returned Egeria, simply. "If Frances were here, I could go with you now. It is n't far."

"I don't need any one, now, my dear," said her father. "You can put the bell here by my pillow, and I can ring."

"Well," said Egeria to Ford. "We will stop

at the office, and tell them, father," she added. Frances promised to listen for the bell, and stood at the office door watching them as they walked away together.

"I think you can easily bend the tree," Egeria said. "It 's very slim, and I thought at first I could bend it myself. I should hate to have you break it."

"I will try not to break it," answered Ford.

They crossed the meadow in desultory talk, but before they reached the edge of the swamp she abruptly halted him, and said with a sort of fearful resolution, "Did you know that my father was here when you came?" She searched his face with a piercing intensity of gaze, her lips apart with eagerness and her breathing fluttered.

"No," said Ford, "my coming here was purely accidental." Her eyes studied his a moment longer: then she dropped them, and hurried on again as abruptly as she had stopped. "But I always hoped I might see you again," he continued, "and tell you — I went to tell your father in Boston — that I never dreamt it was you I hurt there, that night. I wanted to tell him that nothing in the world — But we quarreled" —

"I know, I know," interrupted the girl. "There is the tree," she said, hastily, pointing out a young maple with reddened boughs, that stood some yards beyond the wall. "Do you think you can get to it? Do you think you can bend it down?"

Every nerve in him thrilled with the wrench of

leaving half said what had been so long in his heart; but he must obey her will. "I think so," he replied, and he got over the wall. He stepped from one quaking bed of mossy decay to another, till he reached the tree. He caught it about the slender stem well up towards the limbs, and, bending it over, began to break them away and fling them on the ground.

"Oh, no!" cried Egeria from where she stood. "Don't!"

"Don't what?" asked Ford, turning half round, without releasing the tree.

"You seemed to tear it so. You have enough. That branch at the top" —

"Shall I break it off?"

"No — no. Let it stay."

"Would you like it?"

"Yes."

Ford took out his knife, and slitted the branch from the tree with a downward stroke, and drove the blade into the thick of the hand with which he held the tree. He gathered up the branches, and putting them into the wounded hand gripped it with the other, and returned to Egeria.

She started at sight of the blood. "I made you cut yourself."

"I don't see how that is," answered Ford. "But I cut myself." He stood holding his hand, while the blood dropped to the ground.

"I will tie it up for you," said Egeria, quelling a shudder. "You ought to have something wet next to it. That will keep it from inflaming."

"Yes?" said Ford.

She made search for her handkerchief, and drew forth the stout square of linen which the kindness of the community had provided for her. She shook out its tough expanse. "That is a Shaker handkerchief," she said.

"It looks rather grandiose for the purpose," Ford remarked. "If you will take mine" — He touched as nearly as he could the breast pocket of his coat with his elbow. She soberly obeyed his gesture, and pulled it out. "Can you tear it?"

"I need n't tear it," she answered, folding it into a narrow strip. "I can wet this end in the water, here, and wrap the rest round it."

She stooped to a little pool near the wall, and dipped the handkerchief into it; then she laid the wet corner over the cut, which he had washed in the same pool, and folded the dry part firmly around it. Her finger-tips, soft and warm, left the sensation of their touch upon his hand.

They walked rapidly away. "Better hold it up," she said, seeing that he let his arm hang at his side.

"Oh," he answered stupidly, and obeyed for a moment, and then dropped his hand again.

"You 're forgetting," she said.

"Yes, I was," replied Ford, recollecting himself. "I was thinking that it must have seemed as if some savage beast had torn you."

He looked at the hand on which she wore her ring, and she hid the hand in the folds of her dress,

and turned her head away. Then she glanced at him, as if about to answer, but she only said, "When you get home, you must wet the cloth again."

"Thanks," said Ford; "it will have to look after itself when it stops stinging."

She looked troubled. "Does it hurt you very badly?"

"I suppose it's going through the usual formalities."

"You had better show it to father — Oh!" she cried, blushing, "I have forgotten the leaves for him." She almost ran in retracing her steps.

Ford pursued her. "Miss Boynton, let me go and get them."

"No, no, I can get them. You must n't come. I don't wish you to come." She looked over her shoulder, and saw him standing irresolute. "Don't wait for me; I can take them home."

He lingered a moment, looking after her, and then turned and walked away. He did not go back to the infirmary, but kept on towards his own house, and arrived with a vague smile on his lips, which had shaped them ever since he left her. He scarcely realized then that she had been quick to avail herself of a chance to be alone with him, and that when once with him she had been willing to delay their parting. A jarring sensation of alternate abandon and reserve was what finally remained of the interview in his nerves.

XX.

In the morning, when he walked up into the village, he found her coming out of the office gate. She faltered at sight of him, and glanced anxiously toward him. He had meant to stop at the office, but now he had a senseless impulse to keep on his way. He hesitated, and then crossed to where she stood. She had a small basket in her hand, and she said that Elder Joseph had given her leave to look over his vines, and see if there were any grapes ripe enough yet for her father to eat. There was an indefinable intention in her manner to detain him, which he felt as inarticulately, and there was something more intangible still, — something between fearful question and utter trust of him; something that chiefly intimated itself in the appeal with which her eyes rested on his when she first looked up. He dropped his own eyes before the gaze which he knew to be unconscious on her part, and she said suddenly, as if recollecting herself, "Oh! Will you show your hand to father? How is it?"

"That's all right," answered Ford, putting it into his pocket. She began to walk towards the garden, and he walked with her. "It is n't my work hand."

"Work?" she asked.

"I keep up my scribbling. I write for the papers," he explained further, at a glance of inquiry from her.

"Some of the brothers and sisters write, too," she said. "The Shakers have a paper."

"Yes, I have seen it," said Ford. "They write for pleasure and from duty. I am sorry to say that my work is mostly for the pay it brings. I 'm hoping to do something in another way by and by. In the mean time I write and sell my work. It 's what they call pot-boiling."

"I did n't know they *paid* for writing!"

"They do, — a little. You can starve very decently on it."

"Father used to write for the paper at home, but they never paid him anything. He is slow getting well," she added, with a sad inconsequence, "and I suppose he will never be quite so strong again. But it must be a good sign when he has these cravings. It seems as if he could n't wait till the grapes are ripe; the doctor says he can have all the fruit he wants. Have you ever been in this garden before?" she asked, as they entered the bounds of Brother Joseph's peculiar province.

"No," replied Ford, looking round him with a pleasure for which he could not account. "But I feel as if I might have been here always."

"Yes. I suppose it looks like everybody's garden. It 's like our garden at home." He glanced about it with her, as they stood in the planked path

together. At one side of the beds of pot-herbs, and apart from the ranks of sweet-corn, the melons, the beans, the faded peas, and the long rows of beets and carrots, was a space allotted to flowers, the simple annuals that have long been driven from our prim parterres. "Our garden ran back of the house down to the river; but it was all neglected and run wild. There was a summer-house on the edge of the terrace, and the floor was rotten; the trellises for the grapes were slanting every which way."

She seemed to be recalling these aspects in a fond reverie, rather than addressing him; but they gave him a vivid sense of her past. He saw her in this old garden by the river-side, before any blight had fallen upon her life. He imagined her a very happy young girl, there; not romantic, but simple and good, and even gay. "I know that sort of a garden," he said.

"Yes," she continued, looking dreamily at Brother Joseph's flower-beds, "here is prince's feather, and coxcomb, that I hated to touch when I was little, because it seemed like flesh and blood. And here is bachelor's button, and mourning bride, and marigolds, and touch-me-not."

"I had forgotten them," said Ford. "I suppose I used to see them when I was a boy. But it 's a long time since I was in the country."

"You must be glad to get back."

"No," replied Ford. "I can't honestly say that I am. I wanted to get away from it too badly for

that. The country is for the pleasure of people born in town."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Nothing very definite. When I began to grow up, I found the country in my way. I dare say I should have been uncomfortable anywhere. I was very uncomfortable in the country."

"I have never been much in the city," she said. "But I didn't like it."

He remembered that he had helped to make the city hateful to her, though she seemed to have forgotten it, and he said, in evasion of this recollection, "It 's different with a man. I had my way to make, and the city was my chance."

"And didn't you ever feel homesick?" she asked.

"I used to dream about the place after I came away. I used to dream that I had gone back there to live. That was my nightmare. It always woke me up."

"And did you never go back?"

"No. I have never looked on those hills since I left them, and I never will if I can help it. I suppose it 's a matter of association," he continued. "My associations of not getting on are with the country; my associations of getting on in some sort are with the city. That is enough to account for my hating the one and liking the other."

"Yes," said Egeria, "that is true." She added after a moment, "Have they ever told you what Joseph's associations with this region are?"

"No. I should like to know."

"He saw it in a dream, years before he came here. When he first visited the Vardley Shakers he recognized it, and took it for a sign that he was to stay."

"That was remarkable," said Ford. Egeria was silent. "Do you believe in such things, Miss Boynton?" he asked.

She turned away as if she had not heard him, and began to search the vines for ripe grapes. She went down one side of the long trellis, and he followed down the other. Between the leaves and twisting stems he caught glimpses of her yellow hair and her blue eyes.

"Do you find any?" she asked.

"Any what?"

"Grapes."

"I had n't looked."

She sighed. "It 's about as well. There don't seem to be any." After a while she stopped, and he saw her glance at him through the leaves. "I don't know whether I believe in those things or not. Do you?"

"No."

"The Shakers do. They all think they have had some sign. But I should n't like to know things beforehand. It would n't help you to bear the bad. Besides, it does n't seem to leave you free, somehow. I think the great thing is to be free."

"It 's the first thing."

"Yes; that is what I always felt. It was slavery, even if it was true." He knew what she meant; but he said nothing, though she waited for him to speak. "It was what I tried to say sometimes; but I could n't express it. And I could n't have made him understand." With that screen of vines between them, and each other's faces imperfectly seen through the leaves and tendrils, it was easier to be frank. "It cut us off from everybody in the world. It was what made the quarrel with grandfather."

She waited again, and now Ford said, "Yes, your father said it was that."

"It made everybody suspect us. I did n't care so much for myself after I got away from home, where they did n't know us; but I cared for father. He suffered so from the things he had to bear. You can't think what they were."

"I 'm ashamed to think what some of them were," said Ford.

She paused a moment. "You mean what you said to him in Boston?"

"Yes."

"Yes, that hurt him," she said, simply. "He had been very proud of the interest you took the first time you came. He said you were the only man of science that had taken any notice of him. Afterwards — he could n't make it out."

"I don't wonder!" cried Ford. "It was incredible. But I never came to threaten him."

"He was more puzzled when you would n't meet him in that public séance. Why would n't you?"

"Why?" demanded Ford, in dismay.

"Yes, why?"

"I don't know that I can say."

"But you had some reason. Was it because you thought you would fail?"

Ford did not answer directly. "Can you believe that I wanted to consider him in the matter?" he asked, in turn.

"Yes, that is what I did believe." She drew a long breath, and hid herself wholly behind a thick mass of the vine. "Did you — did you get a letter from me?"

"Yes," said Ford.

"I thought that I ought to write it; I did n't know whether to do it. But I could n't help it. I was glad you refused."

"I was glad you wrote the letter. It was n't always a comfort to me, though. I had no right to any thanks from you. I felt as if I had extorted it."

"Extorted it!" she repeated, with the same eager persistence with which she had pressed him for his reason in refusing to meet her father. "Do you mean — do you mean that you tried to make me write the letter?"

"How could I try to make you write me a letter?" demanded the young man, stupefied.

"I don't know. I was not sure that I understood. I can't tell you — now. Did you destroy it?"

"Destroy what?"

"The letter."

"No: I kept it."

"Oh — will you give it back to me?"

"Certainly." Ford unfolded a pocket-book, and took out a worn-looking scrap of paper, which he passed through an open space in the trellis. Her hand appeared at the aperture and received it. A hesitation made itself felt through the vines. "Will you give it back to *me*, Miss Boynton?"

"There 's nothing to be ashamed of in it," she said, and her hand reappeared at the open space with the letter.

"Thanks," said Ford.

"They will think I am a long time looking for a few grapes," said Egeria.

"They 've no idea how few there are, and how long it takes to find them," answered Ford.

She laughed. "Are they scarce on your side, too?"

"There are no ripe bunches at all. Shall I pick single ones?"

"Oh, yes; any that you can get. It 's rather early for them yet."

"Is it? I thought it was about the right time."

"That shows you have n't lived in the country for a good while. You 've forgotten."

"Yes," assented Ford. "I have n't seen grapes on the vines for ten years."

"Have n't you been out of the city in that time?"

"Not if I could help it."

"And why can't you help it now?"

"They told me I was n't well, and I 'd better go to the mountains." He sketched in a few words his course in coming to Vardley.

"I thought you looked pale, when you first came," she said. After a little while she added, "You can bear it if you 're getting better, I suppose."

He laughed. "Oh, it is n't so disagreeable here. I 'm interested in your Shaker friends."

"They think they are living the true life," said the girl.

"Do you?" asked Ford.

"They are very good; but I have seen good people in the world outside," she answered. "I think they are the kind that would be good anywhere. I should n't like having things in common with others. I should like a house of my own. And I should like a world of my own."

"Yes," said Ford, laughing. "I should like the private house, too. But I don't think I could manage a whole world."

"I mean a world that is for the people that live in it. When they die, they have their own world, and they ought n't to try to come back into ours."

"Oh, decidedly, I agree with you there!" cried the young man.

She seemed not to like his light tone. "I know that I don't express it well."

"It could n't be expressed better."

"I meant that I hoped any friend of mine would be too well off to be willing to come back."

"Yes."

They found themselves at the end of the trellis, and face to face. He dropped his grapes into the basket, where some loose berries rolled about. She looked ruefully at the result of their joint labors.

"Well!" she said, and they walked out of the garden together.

At the gate Ford took out his watch, and stopped with a guilty abruptness. "Miss Boynton, I am going away, — I am going to Boston, this afternoon. I" —

"Going away?"

"Yes, I have business in Boston. Can I do anything for your father or — for you — there?"

"No," she said, looking at him in bewilderment. "Will you come and say good-by to him? Or perhaps you had better not," she faltered.

"I 'm coming back this evening!" he cried in astonishment. "Will you lend me this basket?" he asked.

"Why, yes. It belongs to Rebecca."

"Don't tell her I borrowed it. I must go now. Good-by!"

"Good-by." She stood looking after him till a turn of the road to Vardley Village hid him.

When he reached Boston he found that the year had turned from summer to autumn with a distinctness which he had not noted in the country. The streets, where his nerves expected the fierce heat in which he had left them, were swept by cool inland airs. The crowds upon the pavement had

perceptibly increased; a tide of women, fresh from their sojourn at the sea-side and in the country, was pouring down Winter Street, reanimated for shopping, and with their thoughts set upon ribbons with a vividness that shone in their faces. The third week of the fall season was placarded at the Museum; and in the Public Garden, which he crossed upon an errand to his lodging, there was a blaze of autumnal flowers in place of the summer bloom which he had left. He met here and there groups of public-school children loitering homeward with their books. The great, toiling majority who never go out of town were there, of course; the many whose vacations and purses are short had all returned; it would be some weeks yet before the few who can indulge the luxury of the colored leaves and the peculiar charm of still September days out of town would come home. It was the moment in which Ford had ordinarily the most content in his city. He liked to renew his tacit companionship with all these returning exiles; the promise of winter snugness brought him almost a domestic joy; the keen sparkle of the early-lighted gas in the street lamps and the shop-windows was a pleasure as distinct as it was inarticulate. But now he felt estranged amid the cheerful spectacle of the September afternoon. The country quiet, which he used to hate, tenderly appealed to him; the quaint life of the Shaker village, of which he had, without knowing it, become a part, reclaimed him; the cry of a jay that strutted down an over-

hanging branch to defy him as he walked along the road, after parting with Egeria, was still in his ears; his vision was full of the sunny glisten of meadows where the Shakers' hired men were cutting the rowan, and of roadsides fringed with golden-rod and asters. He was impatient till he could be off again, and he made haste back to the fruiterer's where he had left his basket with an order to fill it with grapes. He was vexed to find it standing empty in a corner.

"You did n't say what kind you wanted," explained the fruiterer.

"Put in what you like, — the best kind," said Ford. "You can judge; they 're for a sick person."

"All right." The man filled the basket, and Ford went to another counter and took up a bouquet, which he added to his purchase.

He bought two or three newspapers, in the cars, and read them on the way back, throwing those he was not reading over the flowers on the seat beside him, so as to hide them.

He got out of the train at Vardley Station with the sense of having committed a public action. He was rescued from this embarrassment, and curiously restored to his self-possession at sight of Egeria, who came driving the old Shaker horse over from the post-office, as the train halted. He was not alarmed to see her, but he asked formally, "Nothing the matter, I hope, Miss Boynton?"

"Oh, no. I came to get the letters; and I

thought I would wait for you, if you were on this train."

"Thanks," said Ford, putting the basket into the open buggy, and mounting to a place beside her. She looked down at it, but said nothing. He took the reins from her, and drove out of the village before he spoke again. "I have got some grapes for your father."

She laughed, and lifted the basket at once into her lap. "I *thought* you were going for something," she said, "after you were gone; and I guessed with Sister Frances. I guessed it was grapes, and she guessed it was peaches. You thought he would be disappointed at Elder Joseph's vines." She raised the lid of the basket and after a glance pushed it to again with a quick gesture, and looked gravely at him. "That is too much," she said.

"I hope you don't think so!" he pleaded. "I counted on your being pleased."

"So I am pleased," she returned. She opened the basket again, and looked within.

"You must have hated to come back to the country," she said, after a silence, "if you like the city so much."

"No. For once I was willing to come back. If the country had n't threatened to keep me, I should n't have hated it. I never hated the country about here. What have you been doing this afternoon? It seems a great while."

"Does it? Yes, it does! I suppose there 's such

a sameness here that anything that breaks it up makes the time longer. Sister Frances says that it 's so when any of them are gone. After you went I came in and stayed with father. He did n't know that I had been trying to get him some grapes. Your going away seemed to fret him, and that made me a little anxious to — to — see if you *had* come."

"I never thought of not coming back."

"Yes, I know. Silas went down to the post-office with me: but Humphrey came along in his buggy, and Silas went back with him. He could n't wait for you, and I said I would."

"Thanks. But you took too much trouble. I expected to walk up from the station."

"I did n't believe you 'd want to carry the basket."

"Yes, I should. But what would you have done if you had had to drive home alone in the dusk?"

"Oh, I knew you would be there."

The lamps were lit in the office, and the window was red with cheerful light where the doctor lay in the infirmary, when they drew up before the gate, and Ford helped Egeria down. Then he took the paper in which the bouquet was wrapped, and handed it to her. "There are a few flowers, too."

"I *thought* it must be flowers," she said. "I 'll put them round the grapes."

"The flowers are for you," said Ford, with dogged resolution.

Laban came across the street from the office, and took the horse by the bridle. "The sisters want

you should take your tea at the office, to-night. They 've got it ready for you, and they 've sent word to Friend Williams not to be expectin' you."

While Ford waited a few moments in the office parlor, Egeria came, and he heard her talking with Rebecca and Diantha in the sitting-room. When the latter came to tell him that tea was ready, he perceived that his gift was already a matter of family approval. He sat down at the table, and Egeria came out of the kitchen adjoining with the polished tin tea-pot in her hand. Then he saw that the table was set for two. Her face was flushed, as if she had been near the heat; but she sat down quietly, saying, "He was asleep, and Frances was with him. I must run back in a minute, for I want him to have them as soon as he wakes." He knew that she meant the grapes. When she was handing him his cup, she half drew it back. "I did n't ask you whether you like cream and sugar both, and I 've put them in."

"I like it so," said Ford.

She ate with more appetite than he, and was gayer than he had seen her before. A happy light was in her eyes, and when they met his this light seemed to suffuse her face. She talked, and he listened dreamily. It was very strange to a man of his solitary life. He did not remember to have seen any one pour tea. At the boarding-house they came and asked if you would have tea or coffee, and brought it to you in a cup; at the restaurant they set it before you in a pot, and you helped yourself,

or the waiter reached over your shoulder and poured it out. Ford looked round the sincerely bare dining-room; the windows were shut to keep out the evening chill, and the curtains were snugly drawn. The door to the kitchen was open, and he could hear Diantha moving about there; now and then she made a little rattling at the stove; once she came in with a plate of rice-cakes, and offered to wait upon them; but Egeria passed the plate to Ford herself, and then gave him the butter and syrup. He tried to make her one with the frightened and joyless creature whom he had first seen in Boston; then he perceived that she had fallen silent under his silent scrutiny.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "is anything the matter?"

"Oh, no!" she answered. "But I must go back to father. Will you come over and see him?"

"Yes."

He walked across the road with her under the stars, keen as points of steel in the moonless sky; but at the gate he said, "No, I won't go in to-night. I will come to see your father to-morrow."

She said "Well," as if she understood that he wished to delay being thanked.

As he lingered, she faltered too, and they stood confronted without speaking. Then he said, "Good-night," and made an offer of offering his hand. She saw it, and stretched hers towards him; but by this time he had let his hand fall, thinking it unnoticed. The manœuvre was reciprocally re-

peated; by a common impulse they both broke into a low, nervous laugh, and their hands met in a quick clasp.

"Thank you for the flowers," she said, when he had got a few paces away.

A little farther off, he glanced back. She seemed to be standing yet at the door; but the light was uncertain, and it might have been a shadow. He delayed a little, and then went back; but she was now gone, and he saw her head reflected against the curtain within.

XXI.

Ford expected that they would meet next in the mood of their parting; but she received him with a sort of defensive scrutiny that puzzled him and estranged her from him. He fancied that she avoided being alone with him, and made haste to shelter herself from him in her father's presence, where she sat and knitted while they talked. If he glanced at her, he found her eye leaving him with a look of anxious quest. He went away feeling that she was capricious. Other days followed when she was different, and met him with eager welcome; but then he did not think her capricious, and he forgot from time to time the inquisition that vexed him and that seemed to weary and distress her.

He commonly wrote in the morning and came in the afternoon. She sat on the threshold of the infirmary, and if her father was awake she invited him in-doors; if her father was asleep, she drew Ford off a little way into the orchard. There had been a change in Boynton. He never spoke hopefully of his condition to Ford; but although he still showed a great feebleness, there were often days when he left his bed and sat up in a rocking-chair to receive his visitor. He did not remain long afoot, and he

never showed any wish to go out-of-doors. Sometimes Egeria and Frances, in their zeal for his convalescence, urged him in the mild fall weather to go out for the air; but after a glance at the landscape he said, "Yes, yes, to-morrow, if it's fair. I'm hardly equal to it to-day." When Ford was not with him, or some of the more metaphysical of the Shakers, he read or mused in his chair. At first he had wished to talk of the questions that perplexed him with Egeria, but she had fondly evaded them; later, when she showed herself willing to afford him this resource, he had no longer the wish for it, and did not respond to her promptings.

His mind must have been dwelling upon this change in himself and her, one afternoon, when Ford came in and sat down with him. "You see," he said, "how they have tricked out my room for me?" and he indicated the boughs of colored leaves, varied with bunches of wild asters and tops of golden-rod, in which the Shakers had carried him the autumn. "There isn't healing in my leaves, as there was in the flowers which they brought Egeria this spring," he added, with a slight sigh, "but there is sympathy — sympathy." Ford left him to the pleasure he evidently found in the analogy and contrast, and Boynton presently resumed: "There is an experiment which I should have liked to try, if she had continued the same. I should have liked to see if we could not change places, and she exert upon me that influence which I once had over her. There is no telling how san-

ative it might be in a case like mine, in which there is a certain obscurity of origin and character. But I am convinced that it would be useless to attempt the experiment. I see now that the psychic force must have left her entirely during her sickness. Not a trace of it remains. The fact is a very interesting one, which I should hope to investigate with important results, if I could live to do so. It may be that we approach the other world only through some abnormal condition here. You have observed this remarkable change in my daughter ? "

" You know I only saw Miss Boynton two or three times before I came here," said Ford. " She seems very much better."

" That *is* the change. Her power has escaped in this return to health. I saw it, — I almost noted its flight. Day by day, after the crisis of her fever, when convalescence began, I perceived that she grew more and more rebellious to my influence, without knowing it. If I had obeyed my intuitions, I should never have put her powers to the final test. I see now that you had nothing to do with our failure here, whatever the effect of your sphere was in Boston. Her gift, rare and wonderful as it was, was the perishable efflorescence of a nervous morbidity. I might have known this before, — perhaps I *did* know it, and refused to accept it as a fact. It was hard, it was impossible, to relinquish my belief in her continued powers just when I had brought them to the most favora-

ble conditions for their exercise. But I don't give up my belief in what has been. I know that she once possessed the power that has been withdrawn, if ever it existed on earth. You will get out of the matter very easily by saying that it never did exist," added Boynton bitterly. "*I* should once have said so; but now I say, whoever keeps it or loses it, this power has never ceased to exist. Has my daughter ever spoken to you of this matter?" he demanded abruptly.

"Yes," said Ford.

"It would be intolerable if she knew how great her loss was. But she never realized the preciousness of her gift while she possessed it."

The color of superiority, of censure, which tinged these words irritated the young man. "As far as I could understand, she seemed to dislike ghosts."

"Yes, I know that. I had that to contend with in her."

"It seemed to me that she had a terror of them, and that your researches had cost her" — Ford stopped.

"What?" asked Boynton.

"She has never complained," answered the other. "I could only conjecture" —

"Oh, I can believe that she never complained!" cried Boynton; and now he lay a long space silent. At last, "Yes," he groaned, with an indescribable intensity of contrition in his tone, "I see what you mean! I seized upon a simple, loving nature, good and sweet in its earthliness, and sacred in it, and

alienated it from all its possible happiness to the uses of my ambition. I have played the vampire!"

Ford rose in alarm at the effect of his words, and essayed what reparation he could. "No," he protested. "The harm is less than you think. I don't believe that any one but ourselves can do us essential injury here. We may make others unhappy, but we can't destroy the possibility of happiness in them; we can only do that in ourselves. Your conscience has to do with your motives; it judges you by them, and God — if we suppose Him — will not judge you by anything else. The effect of misguided actions belongs to the great mass of impersonal evil."

It was the second time that he had presumed to distinguish between Boynton and Egeria, and he had again committed a cruel impertinence. He continued with a sort of remorseful rage to launch upon Boynton such fragments of consolation as came into his head; and he hurried from him without knowing that his phrases about impersonal evil had already floated that buoyant spirit beyond the regrets in which he had plunged it.

Still heated and ashamed, he issued from the infirmary, and, as if it were strange that she should be there, he started at sight of Egeria under one of the orchard trees. But in that fascination which makes us hover about the victim of some wrong or the witness of some folly of ours, he pressed towards her. She was leaning against the trunk of the tree, with some knitting in her hand, and he

flung himself on the grass at her feet. He thought that he meant to confess to her what had just passed, but he made no attempt to do so. "Are you so very tired?" she asked, smiling down at him.

"Not very," he answered, "but I know no reason why I should n't sit down, — except one."

"What 's that?"

"That you 're standing."

It was pretty, and she was a girl, and she softly laughed as she began to knit. "That 's work in real earnest," he said, looking at the substantial gray sock mounted on her needles.

"Yes; the Shakers sell them," she explained. "I suppose you have got through your work for the day."

"I 've got through my writing, if you call that work. It 's so dull it can't be play." Again he thought he would speak of what had passed between him and her father, but he did not.

"Do you write stories?" she asked, with her eyes on her knitting.

"Oh, not so bad as that! I do what they call social topics, — perhaps because I never go into society; and I do them with difficulty, as I deserve, for I 'm only making literature a means. I understand that if you want to be treated well by it you must make it an end, and be very serious and respectful with it."

"Oh, yes," said the girl, as if she did not understand.

"I 'm serious enough," he continued, "but I don't respect my writing as it goes on. It 's as good as most; but it ought to be as good as the least."

"What are social topics?" she asked presently.

"I suppose I 'm treating a social topic now. I 'm writing about some traits of New England country life. I began it — do you care to hear?"

"Yes, I should like to hear about it if you will tell me."

"It 's nothing. I was telling you the other day of our start from Boston. I could n't help noticing some things on the way; my ten years in town had made me a sort of foreigner in the country, and I noticed the people and their way of living; and after I got here I sent a letter to a newspaper about it. You might think that would end it; but you don't know the economies of a hack-writer. I 've taken my letter for a text, and I 'm working it over into an article for a magazine. If I were a real literary man I should turn it into a lecture afterwards, and then expand it into a little book." Egeria knitted on in silence, as if her mind were away, or had not strength to deal with these abstractions. "Who is that?" asked Ford, as a young Shakeress with a gentle face looked out of a window of the nearest family house, and nodded in pleasant salutation to Egeria.

"That is the school-teacher."

"They all look alike to me, — the sisters. I don't see how you tell them apart, so far off."

"Yes, they all have the same expression, — the Shaker look. But they 're very different."

"Why, of course. And the Shaker look is a very good look. It 's peaceful. I suppose they have their bickerings, though."

"Not often. They 're what they seem. That 's their great ambition."

"It 's an immense comfort. You must be quite at home among them."

"Yes," said the girl.

"Do you mean no?"

"They do everything they can to make me; but they have their own world, and I don't belong to it. They feel that as well as I do; but they can't help it."

"Of course not. That 's the nature of worlds, big and little. You can't be at home *near* them; you have to be *in* them to be comfortable. I have a world in my own neighborhood that I don't belong to. I like to abuse it; but it 's quite as good a neighbor as I deserve, and it would be civil if I made an effort to fit into it. But I suppose I was a sort of born outcast."

"Does Mr. Phillips write, too?" asked the girl.

The abruptness of the transition was a little bewildering; but Ford answered, "My Phillips? No; he talks."

"But has n't he any business?"

"None of his own. Did he amuse you?"

"I don't think I understood him," said Egeria.

"He would be charmed with your further ac-

quaintance. He would tell you that he could meet you on common ground, — that he did n't understand himself."

She left Phillips by another zigzag. "I suppose," said she, "you like the influence that a writer has. It must be a pleasure to feel your power over people."

"No," said Ford, "I don't care anything about the influence. It shocks me to think of people being turned this way or that by my stuff."

"Then you believe," she said, with that recurrent intensity, "that we can have power over others without knowing it, and even without wishing it?"

"Oh," he answered carelessly, "we all control one another in the absurdest way."

"Yes." She turned quite pale, and looked away, passing her hand over her forehead as if she were giddy. Then she rose quickly, and hurried down the path to the infirmary. The young man followed.

"Did you think you heard your father's bell?"

"I 'd better see if he rang." She went into the little house, but came out directly. "No; he 's trying to sleep."

"Then we must go back, so as not to disturb him."

"Yes," she said, but with an accent of interrogation and reluctance. "I don't believe I ought to leave him."

"We shall be near enough," he rejoined with a

kind of willfulness. "Here comes Sister Frances; she will stay with him."

"I might speak to her," murmured Egeria, hesitating, as Frances came across the road.

"It is n't worth while. She will find him alone, and will naturally stay till you come in." Ford glanced about him. "Which is the apple-tree they call yours?"

"The one they brought me out under the first day I was well enough?"

"Yes; I have heard a great deal of that tree. It is famous in the community annals."

"Oh, it does n't look the least now as it did then." She led the way far up the orchard slope. But when they came to the tree, and she said, putting her hand on the trunk, "This is it," neither of them spoke of it. She glanced at the hill on the brow of which some chestnut-trees stood.

"We could get a better view from that place," he suggested.

"Do you think so?" She climbed half up the wall that divided the orchard from a meagre pasture above, and looked back. He passed her and helped her over the wall. "I forgot that this meadow was so wet," she said, hesitating near the wall.

"But nature never does things by halves," said Ford. "Where she makes a sopping meadow, she puts plenty of stones to step on; and where you are doubtful of your footing, she puts me to lend you a helping hand." He extended his hand to her as he

spoke, and drew her lightly to the sloping bowlder on which he stood, and on which she must cling to him for support.

"Oh, I could get on well enough alone," she said, laughing nervously.

"You can get on better with help."

"Yes."

She followed him, springing from stone to stone, staying herself now by his hand and now by his arm, till they reached the hard, dry top, where the tangled low blackberry vines overran the bowlder heads thickly crusted with lichens.

"I did n't suppose it was so bad," she said, shaking out her skirts.

"I don't think it so very bad," he returned. "It was n't a great way across."

"No. There are some chestnuts. It must be too soon for them."

"Let us see," said Ford. He advanced leisurely, and with a club knocked off some burs. Returning with them to the rock, where she had stood watching him, he hammered the nuts from their cells. They were scarcely in the milk yet. "These trees are too old," he said. "The nuts ripen first on the young trees that stand apart in the meadows. There are some in the rye-field just beyond these pine woods, here," he said, pointing to the growth on their left.

"That would be too far," she answered, following his gesture with a glance. "We had better go back."

"We can go back that way. It 's good walking."

She did not answer, but he led on again, and she followed. "How still and warm it is!" she cried, with a luxurious surrender to the charm of the place. The slanting sun struck through the slender boles of the trees, and burnished the golden needles under their feet. There was no sound of life save their steps, and their voices, which took a lower key; the air was rich with the balsam of the trees. She deeply inhaled it. "Yes, yes," she murmured. "It all comes back. I was afraid," she said, in answer to the look with which he turned upon her, "that I had lost the feeling which I had when I first got well. But I have n't."

"What was it?"

"I don't know if I can tell. Something as if I belonged in such places — as if they missed me when I came away — I don't know. It was something very silly" — She stopped.

"Don't grieve the woodland by hurrying through it, then," said Ford, with a playfulness which, now that he indulged it, seemed natural to him. "Wait a moment. This rock is a new feature, — I don't remember this." A vast bowlder rose at the side of their path, and he walked round it and clambered to the top, from which he bent over to speak to her again. "Would you like to come up? It 's quite easy on this side."

"What can you see?"

"Nearly the whole earth."

She found the opposite side of the rock a slope,

broken by some natural steps. He came halfway down, and, reaching her his hand, pulled her strongly up.

The top was scantly wide enough for them both; and while he stood she sat at his feet and looked out at the landscape which a break in the woods revealed at that height. It was the valley in which the village and farms of the Shakers lay; but it stretched wider than they had ever seen it, and on the other side, beyond the river, the hills rose steeper. The red sunset bathed it in a misty light, through which shone the scarlet of the maples, the gold of the elms by the river, the tender crimson of the young growths in the swamp lands. On the hill-side some of the farm windows had caught the sun, and blazed and flickered with mimic fire. Along a lower slope ran a silent train, marking its course with puffs of white steam.

"I can confess, now," said Ford, "that if I had n't climbed this rock I should n't have known just where we were. But here are all the landmarks." He pointed to the familiar barns and family houses below.

"How near we are!" she cried, looking down. "I felt as if we were miles away. These woods are not large enough to get lost in, are they?"

"Not now. They were, a minute ago." He sat down beside her, and they looked at the landscape together. "It 's rather sightly, as Joseph says."

"We had better go down," she murmured. But neither of them made a movement to go. They

sat looking at the valley. "Now the fire has caught the windows higher up," she said. They watched the glittering panes as they darkened and kindled. The windows of the highest farm-house flashed intensely, and then slowly blackened. A light blue haze hovered over the valley.

"The curtain is down," said Ford.

She started to her feet, and looked round. "Why, the sun has set!"

"Did n't you know that?" he asked.

"No," she said, sadly. "It seemed as if it would last longer. But nothing lasts."

"No, nothing lasts," he repeated. "But generally things last long enough. I could have stood another hour or two of sunset, however. And sometimes I 've known days that I would have been willing to have last forever, if I could have had out my eternity in this world."

"Is that — is *that* the way you feel, too?" she asked, turning swiftly upon him that strange, searching glance.

"Why, not always. What is the matter?"

"Nothing — nothing. Let us go down." She took his hand, and clung to it, in descending, as if eager to escape to him from some fear of him.

They went on in the direction they had first taken. She walked at his side, and when his pace fell to a slow saunter she did not attempt to hasten it. A red squirrel took shape and motion out of the russet needles, and raced up one of the pines, whose feathery tops he bent in his long leaps from

tree to tree; a partridge suddenly whirred up from the path before them; the life was like shadow, the shadow was like life, as the twilight thickened round them. "Are you tired?" he asked. "Am I making you walk too far?"

"I am not tired," she answered, but stopping as he stopped.

"I am. I 'm out of breath," he said. "Do you know this place?"

She glanced round. "I believe I should know it if I were here alone. It looks familiar. It looks like the place where Laban found us that morning when we were trying to walk to Vardley Station. The brook ought to be running along in the hollow, here. Once he asked me if I knew the place; but I did n't. Do you think it 's the place?"

"How should I know? You never told me of it before."

"Then the fever must have begun," she mused aloud. "I thought — I must have thought you — were there! I ought n't" —

"Oh," laughed Ford, "we put people in all sorts of places in dreams, feverish or otherwise. But I think the place you mean is lower down. I was in hopes you knew better where we were. I don't know."

Egeria laughed also. "Then we are lost!"

"Yes. Are you frightened?"

"I should hate to be lost here alone."

"I shall go presently and look up our whereabouts. Shall I go now?"

"If we keep walking we shall get through the woods in a few minutes. Which way are your chestnuts?"

"I don't know that, now, either. Do you care to look them up?"

"No. I thought you wanted them."

"I think it 's better to stay here. No," he added, capriciously, "it 's better to go home."

"Well," she responded with the same trusting content in which she had let all his impulses sway her.

A thrill, very wild and sweet, played through his nerves. "I — I" — he began; then suddenly, "Wait here!" he cried, and ran down to the brow of the hill along which the woodland stretched. "It 's all right!" he called back, and he turned to retrace his steps. But she was no longer where he had left her. He disliked to call out to her; they were very near the house in which he lodged, and he did not wish to make an alarm. He pushed hither and thither through the gathering dusk, but he could not find her; and he blamed himself for having brought her into this embarrassment. He had once seen tramps in those woods; and now it would be almost dark when they reached home. All at once he came upon her at the foot of a tree, against which she quietly leaned. "What are you doing here?" he demanded, impatiently. "Why did you go away?" He thought he had spoken harshly; but she only seemed amused.

"I have n't moved. This is where you left me."

They both laughed at that. "I have been running everywhere, round and round, as lost people do in the Adirondacks, when they are going to write about it afterwards. It 's absurd to be lost here. It 's like being drowned in a saucer. Were you afraid?"

"No. What should I be afraid of?"

"Certainly not bears, — till I came up. Will you take my arm? I must n't lose you again. Will they be uneasy about you?"

"Oh, they will know that I went away with you, and some of them will see us coming back together."

"Yes," said the young man.

"Besides, I can tell them that we missed the way."

"I 'm afraid if you do that they won't let you come with me again."

"I 'm afraid they won't believe me if I tell them *where* we got lost," she said. When they came to open ground, it was much lighter. "It is n't so late as I thought."

"No," he answered; "we were actually lost in that boundless forest by daylight. But it is n't so remarkable in my case as it is in yours, Miss Boynton. I don't know what mysterious influence you are going to say bewildered you."

"Influence?" she repeated, with a start.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing!" She withdrew her hand from his arm.

He looked round, and saw that they had reached the great stone bowl of the wayside fountain. A sense of hideous anomaly possessed him. "Did I become intolerable just here?" he demanded, bitterly. "Why do you endure me? You and your father ought to hate me. I have done you nothing but harm. Why do you ever speak to me? I ought to be abominable to you!"

"I don't know," she answered vaguely. "Do you think it is" —

He laughed harshly. "Inexplicable! You don't forget anything?"

"No," she reluctantly admitted. "I don't forget."

"I can understand your father's position. He suffers me upon some theory of his. But you, — you are a woman, and women don't forgive very easily. Come, Miss Boynton," he cried, mixing his self-banter with his pain, "confess that I am some malignant enchanter, and that I have the power of casting an ugly spell over you, that deprives you of the wholesome satisfaction of telling me that I 'm detestable."

"A spell," she began; but her voice died weakly away, and she stood looking into his face with puzzled entreaty.

"If you would tell me once for all that I am the greatest ruffian in the world, with neither pity nor decency, it might break the charm, and then I could go away to-morrow morning. I've been waiting for that. Will you try?"

"I can't say that," she murmured.

"But you believe it?"

"No" —

"That 's part of the sorcery. You must have often tried to believe it."

She was silent, and he felt that her silence was full of distress. She turned away with a sort of helplessness; he followed her, trying to retrieve himself. But he could not find anything to say, and they scarcely spoke as they walked back through the village. At the gate of the office her parting with him was almost a flight.

XXII.

THE next day Ford came, and found Egeria on the threshold, where she often met him. At first glance he thought he read in her face something like an impulse to run from him; but she quelled the impulse, if she had it, and greeted him with a resolute coldness, which he would not recognize. He had a broad yellow hickory leaf in one hand, and on this lay a little heap of blackberries; they were long and narrow like mulberries, and they had hung on the canes, hoarding the last sweetness of the year. "Perhaps your father will like these," he said; and he told her of the hollow beside the road in which he had found them. "They 've got all that was left of the summer in them," he added. "Will you have them?"

"I don't believe they would be good for him," she began stiffly.

Ford tossed them away. "How is the doctor to-day?" he asked.

"He 's better. Will you come in?"

"No, thank you. I am going to the post-office. Good-by."

"Good-by," she said, and they exchanged a look of mutual dismay, which hardened into pride before their eyes dropped.

At the post-office Ford found a letter for Egeria, and carried it to Humphrey, who put it away in his desk, and said he would give it to her when she came in.

"It don't seem the same handwritin' as the other. I don't know," he said, shutting his desk-lid, "as you heard that they got a letter this mornin' from a lawyer down t' their place. As I understood from Frances, — Egery read it to her, — the gran'father 's left Egery what prop'ty there was. The' wa' n't no great, I guess."

The fact jarred upon Ford. Against all sense he connected it with her changed manner, for which, till then, he had found reason enough in the terms of their parting the day before. This legacy seemed the world thrusting in between them; it was as if it crossed some purpose, broke some hope, of his.

He stopped mechanically, on his way home, in the hollow of the roadside where he had found the blackberries, and looked idly at the canes. Presently he saw that there were no berries left on them. He was turning away, when a sound like suppressed laughter caught his ear. There was a rustle in a thicket near, and Egeria and one of the youngest Shakeresses came out.

"We have got them all," said the former; she blushed appealingly, while the latter still giggled. "I did n't suppose you would come again. When we saw you looking so, Susan could n't help laughing." Ford reddened with embarrassment. "It

seems greedy to take them. I did n't suppose — I never thought of your wanting them. Will you — will you — take some? " She offered him her basket.

" Thanks," he said, awkwardly refusing, " I don't care for them. I 'm glad you 've found them."

He turned and walked off, leaving her where she stood, with her basket still extended towards him. She watched him out of sight, and then made a few paces after him. On a sudden she dropped her basket, and sinking down hid her face on her knees. The Shakeress picked up the basket and the berries which were jostled out of it, and stood passively near, looking at Egeria for what seemed a long time.

There came a sound of wheels. " Is that you, Susan? " called Elihu from the road.

" Yee," promptly answered the Shakeress.

Egeria sprang to her feet, and seized the basket from her. " Come! come! " she whispered, and fled farther into the woods.

But the girl did not follow her. She went out into the road, where Elihu sat in his buggy, and stood demurely waiting his question.

" Was that Egeria? "

" Yee."

" Why did she run away? "

" She was crying."

" What made her cry? "

The girl was silent.

" What made her cry? " repeated Elihu.

"She had got all the berries, when Friend Ford came, and he seemed kind of put out."

"Get in with me," said Elihu. "You should not be here alone."

In the evening Elihu went to the office, and joined the office sisters in their sitting-room. One of them took his hat and cane, and the other pulled a rocking-chair towards the air-tight stove, in which a new fire was softly roaring.

"The evenings begin to be chilly, now," he said.

"Yee," answered Rebecca, "the days are shortening. Did you find the folks all well at Harshire?"

"Yee," he said; and then he sat rocking himself absently and somewhat sadly to and fro, while the sisters, with their hands in their laps, passively waited for him to speak farther. Humphrey, hearing his voice, came in from his room, and Laban followed. Sister Frances, with her pale cheeks a little brightened by her walk across from the infirmary, entered the other door. Elihu lifted his voice. "But I did n't find all the folks here so well."

"Why, what do you mean, Elihu?" cried Diantha. "Is anybody sick with you?"

"Is Friend Boynton worse?" Humphrey asked, turning his head up towards Frances, who was still on foot, while he was seated.

"Nay," answered Frances, fluttered with anxiety

and curiosity; "he is uncommon bright and well, to-night."

"It is no sickness of the body that I mean, and yet it is a disease of this life only. I hardly know how to say what I suspect, — or rather feel sure of." His listeners did not interrupt him, but waited in resignation for his next word. He looked round at their faces. "Egeria is getting foolish about Friend Ford."

"For shame, Elihu!" exclaimed Frances, with an indignant impulse. The rest stirred uneasily in their chairs, but did not speak.

Elihu looked kindly at Frances, but he did not address her directly in adding, "As I was coming home this afternoon, I met Friend Ford down at the turn of the road, looking strange and excited. He did n't seem to see me, and he went on without speaking. I thought I saw Susan among the bushes, and I called to her."

"I sent her!" Frances broke in. "I sent her in my place, because I could n't leave Friend Boynton and Egery wanted to go and get some late blackberries for him that Friend Edward had told her about." Frances, by right of her special tenderness for the Boyntons, always spoke of Ford by his first name.

"Yee," replied Elihu gently, "so Susan told me, — she is a good child. She told me that Friend Ford had found them there, and because he had seemed vexed Egeria had shed tears."

"It was because they had got all the berries, and

she thought it would look selfish and greedy to him," Frances interposed a second time.

"Yee," Elihu again consented, "so Susan told me. It is not the only time that I feared she had got to feeling foolish about him."

"Foolish about him!" Frances could not contain herself. "She would *never* feel foolish about a young man! And if she felt foolish about him he would feel foolish about her, too!"

"Yee," said Elihu. "They have been driving and walking together, — picking leaves and grapes and berries. He stops in the orchard in the afternoon, and talks with her by the hour."

"It 's while her father 's asleep," explained Frances. "Whenever Friend Boynton 's awake, Edward talks with him. You would n't want him waked up out of his sleep to talk, would you?"

"Nay," said Elihu, while the faintest smile moved his lips, in kindly derision of the inefficiency of Frances' defense. "Friend Ford writes in the morning, and Friend Boynton sleeps in the afternoon."

"Elihu!" cried Frances, angrily.

"Frances," returned Elihu, with reëstablished gravity, "will you tell me yourself that you have never thought they were foolish about each other, — what they call being in love?"

Frances wiped the tears from her eyes with her stout handkerchief, which she had knotted into a ball. "You are too bad, Elihu. You have no right to ask such a question. You had n't ought to put me on trial."

"You put yourself on trial, Frances," said Elihu, affectionately. "You began to talk while I was speaking. But I withdraw the question. I never meant to hurt your feelings. I know you have always done for the best."

"I have often heard you say," Frances quavered reproachfully, "that the worst thing about our young people, when they get to foolin', is that they run away. You said that if they would only tell us honestly how they felt we would let them go and be married, and we would be friends with them afterwards. Now, when there are two young folks here that don't think of runnin' away, or hidin' anything, you 're not satisfied. Do you want Egery and Edward to run away?"

"Nay," replied Elihu; "do you want them to be courting each other here, right under our noses?"

"It *is n't* under our noses!" cried Frances, resenting the phrase.

"Well, our eyes, then," said Elihu, patiently. "Do you think it is a good example to the rest of our young folks?"

"They 're not of our family! They 've never been gathered in!"

"Nay, I know that," admitted Elihu. "But does that help the matter, as far as the example goes? We all know by bitter experience how hard it is for the young to tread the path that leads to the angelic life; how cruelly it is beset with flints and shards, and how the flesh bleeds with the sting

of its brambles. Do you want them mocked with the sight of flowers that tempt them to the earthly pastures? Egeria is a good girl" —

"Oh, she is, she *is!*" sobbed Frances.

"And I don't believe she understands herself that she 's foolish about him" —

"I *know* she does n't! It would kill her!"

"Nay, I 'm not sure of that," said Elihu, with another flicker of a smile. "But that makes the case easier to deal with. We need not speak to her at all. We can speak to the young man."

"Speak to the young man!" cried Frances. "Tell him that Egery is in love with him before he has ever asked her" — She stopped in horror.

"We do not gloss this thing among ourselves," said Elihu coldly, "and we need not care for the feints and pretenses used in the world outside. But we can tell him that he 's foolish about her. I have talked the matter over with Joseph and the ministers, and we have agreed that Friend Ford should be spoken to." Frances went out of the room, turning her back upon the meditated outrage. "The only question now is," continued Elihu, without regarding her withdrawal, "who shall speak to him."

A perceptible sensation passed through the others, but no one answered. After a moment, Laban said from the corner where he sat, "Some like bellin' the cat." The sisters relieved the tension of their nerves in a low titter, but Elihu and Humphrey remained grave; and it is doubtful if

Laban really intended a joke, though his face relaxed at the merriment of the sisters.

"The ministers," resumed Elihu, "were not sure whether it was the province of the elders or the trustees, and I came to consider that point with you, Humphrey."

Humphrey rose, with his face twisted by an expression as of severe bodily pain. He moved his arms haplessly about, and took off and then put on his spectacles. He tried in vain to smile. "I d' know," he said, "as I 'm a very good hand at speakin' to folks. I don't seem to have any command o' language. I should think myself, it was for the elders, some on 'em, to speak."

"You have transacted all the business with the young man," said Elihu. "You have had frequent interviews with him, and you go a good deal into the world, on business. We thought, perhaps, that you would best know how to approach him."

"I ain't one to get acquainted easy," replied Humphrey, "and I never felt no ways at home with Friend Ford. He seems to be of a kind of offish disposition." He sat down again, and hanging his head began to tilt the chair in front of him on its hind legs. "I should n't want to intrude no ways into the province of the elders. I don't seem to feel that it 's so much of a business question as what it is a question of family discipline."

"You may be right," admitted Elihu.

"If I could see it as my duty, I should n't be one

to shirk it. But it 's like this." He paused unsuccessfully for a comparison, and then added, "It 's a question of family discipline. I should ha' thought it was for the ministers to speak."

"We should only have recourse to the ministers in extreme cases," said Elihu. "Besides, you thought just now it was for the elders to speak."

"Well, the elders *or* the ministers," returned Humphrey, without looking up.

Elihu compassionated his futility with a moment's silence. Then he sighed slightly, and said, "I agree with you, Humphrey. But I thought that I ought to give you the opportunity, and if you saw your duty in it I ought to yield to you. I did not want to have the appearance of forth-putting, in such a case, and I certainly don't covet the task of speaking to Friend Ford. He appears to me a person subject to sudden gusts of anger, and there is no telling how he may take the interference."

"That is so," admitted one of the sisters.

"There ain't no question about forth-puttin', Elihu," said Humphrey, with the cordiality of a great relief. "Every one 'd know 't you did n't seek such a duty. But Friend Ford 'll take it all right; you 'll see. He 'll look at it in the same light you do."

Elihu rose, and took his hat and stick. "I shall probably find him in his room, now, I suppose."

Humphrey stood as much aghast as it was in his power to do. "Was you — you wa' n't goin' to speak to him right away?"

"Yee. Why should I put it off? He cannot take it any better to-morrow or next week than he would to-night. And the trouble would n't grow less if we waited till doomsday." Elihu went out; the closing of the hall door upon him was like an earthquake to those within.

"I declare for it," said Laban, "I 'most feel like goin' along down to Friend Ford's and waitin' outside."

"Well," observed Rebecca, slighting the bold proposition, "Elihu never *was* one to be afraid."

"That is so, Rebecca," said Diantha.

Humphrey said nothing. The accumulation and complication of evils brought upon the family by the Boyntons had long passed his control.

XXIII.

Elihu walked rapidly down the moon-lighted street. When he reached the old family house, he groped his way up from the outer door to that of the meeting-room, in which Ford lodged, and tapped upon it with his stick. There was the sort of hesitation within which follows upon surprise and doubt; then the sound of a chair pushed back was heard, and Ford came to the door with a lamp in his hand; he looked like one startled out of a deep reverie. "Anything the matter with Dr. Boynton?" he asked, after a gradual recognition of Elihu.

"Nay," replied the Shaker. "Friend Boynton is better than usual, I believe. I wish to have a little talk with you, Friend Ford. Shall I come in?"

Ford found that he was holding the door ajar, and blocking the entrance. "Why, certainly," he said. He led the way, and setting the lamp on the table pushed up another chair to the corner fireplace, where some logs were burning, and where he had evidently been sitting. "Sit down."

The Shaker obeyed, and with his palms resting on his knees craned his neck round and peered at

the different corners of the room and up at the ceiling before he spoke. "Are you comfortable here, Friend Ford?"

"Yes," answered the young man. "I am a sort of stray cat, and any garret is home to me. I can't say, though, that I 've ever occupied the dwelling of a whole community before."

"Yee, this building once housed a good many people. It was a cross to leave it; but our numbers have fallen away, and we crowd together for comfort and encouragement. It 's an instinct, I suppose. Well, what do you think of the Shakers, so far, Friend Ford?" Elihu had an astute glimmer in his eye as he asked the question.

"Really, I hardly know what to say," answered Ford.

"Say what you think. We may not like the truth, but we always desire to hear it."

"I should probably say nothing offensive to you, if I said all that 's in my mind. I believe I think very well of you. I don't see why you don't succeed. I don't see why you don't supply to Protestantism the very refuge from the world that we talk of envying in Catholicism."

"That is much the position that Friend Boynton took."

"I don't understand why you are a failing body. The world has tired and hopeless people enough to throng ten thousand such villages as yours."

"We should hardly be satisfied with the weary and discouraged," said Elihu, without resentment.

"And our system offers few attractions. Folks are not so anxious for the angelic life in heaven that they want to begin it on earth."

Ford smiled. "You offer shelter, you offer a home and perfect immunity from care and anxiety."

"But we require great sacrifices," rejoined the Shaker gravely. "We put husband and wife asunder; we bid the young renounce the dream of youth; we say to the young man, Forego; to the young girl, Forget. We exact celibacy, the supreme self-offering to a higher life. Even if we did not consider celibacy essential to the angelic life, we should feel it to be essential to communism. We must exact it, as the one inviolable condition."

Ford sat a moment thinking. "I dare say you are right." He looked interested in what Elihu was saying, and he added, as if to prompt him to further talk, "I have been thinking about it a good deal since I 've been here, and I don't see how you can have communism on any other terms. But then your communism perishes, because nature is the stronger, and because you can't recruit your numbers from the children of your adherents. You must look for accessions from the enemy."

"Yee, that is one of our difficulties. And we have to fight the enemy within our gates perpetually. Even such of us as have peace in our own hearts must battle in behalf of the weaker brethren. We must especially guard the young against the snares of their own fancies."

"I dare say it keeps you busy," said Ford.

"It does. We must guard them from both the knowledge and the sight of love." The word brought a flush to the young man's face, which Elihu did not fail to note. "Friend Ford, I have understood you to wish us well?" He rose, and resting his arm on the chimney-piece looked down with gentle earnestness into the face of the young man, as he sat leaning back in his chair with his hands clasped behind his head.

"Yes, certainly."

"You would not wittingly betray us?"

"Really" —

"I don't mean that. You would n't knowingly put any obstacle in our way, — any stumbling-block before the feet of those whom we are trying to lead towards what we think the true life?"

"Elihu," said Ford, "I thoroughly respect you all, and I should be grieved to interfere with you. Why do you ask me these questions? Have you any reason to be dissatisfied with my behavior here?"

"Nothing," continued Elihu, "is so hard to combat in the minds of our young folks as the presence of that feeling in others who consider it holy and heavenly, while we teach that it is of the earth, earthy."

"Well?"

"The more right and fit it appears, the more complex and subtle is the effect of such an example. It is impossible that we should tolerate it a

moment among us after we become convinced of its existence. Self-defense is the law of life."

"Well, well!" cried Ford, getting up in his turn, and confronting Elihu on more equal terms, "what has all this to do with me?" His face was red, and his voice impatient.

Elihu was not disturbed. He asked calmly, "Don't you know that Egeria is in love with you?"

Ford stood breathless a moment. "Good heavens, man!" he shouted. "Her father is at death's door!"

Elihu stood with his wide-brimmed hat resting on one hand; he turned it slowly round with the other. "Friend Boynton is very strangely sick. The doctor says he does n't know how long he may last. Young people soon lose the sense of danger which is not immediate. The kind of love I speak of is the master-feeling of the human heart; it flourishes in the very presence of death; it grows upon sorrow that seems to kill. It knows how to hide itself from itself. It takes many shapes, and calls itself by many other names. We have seen much to make us think we are right about Egeria. Have you seen nothing?"

Ford did not reply. His thoughts ran back over all the times that he had seen and spoken with Egeria, and his heart slowly and deeply beat, like some alien thing intent upon the result; and then it leaped forward with a bound.

"Perhaps," said the Shaker, "I am wrong to

put the question in the way I do. We deal so plainly with ourselves and with one another in such cases that I might well forget the sophistication that the world outside requires in the matter. I do not wish to do you injustice, and I shall be glad if I have opened my mind for nothing. I will merely ask whether you have not done anything or said anything to make her like you."

"This is prepostèrous," said Ford. "Do you think these are the circumstances for love-making? I am here very much against my will, because I can't decently abandon a friendless man" —

"Friend Boynton has plenty of friends here," interrupted Elihu.

"I beg your pardon; I know that. Then I am here because I can't leave a dying man who seems to find comfort in my presence. And whatever may be the security which Miss Boynton has fallen into, I have had her father to remind me of his danger by constant allusions to it, as if his death were near at hand."

"Do you believe it is?"

"That is n't the question. The question is whether a man, being trusted with a knowledge of dangers which she does n't know, could have any such feeling towards her as you imagine." Ford bent a look of angry demand upon the Shaker.

"Yee," the latter answered, "I think he could, if he meant the best that love means. If he knew that they were poor, and that after her father's death she would be left alone in the world, he might

very well look on her with affection even across a dying pillow, and desire to be the protector and the stay of her helplessness. I don't wish to pry into your concerns, and if there is nothing between you and Egeria it will be enough for you to say so."

"Between us!" cried Ford, bitterly. "I will tell you how I first met these people, and then you shall judge how much reason there is for love between her and me."

"Nay," interjected Elihu, "there is no need of a reason for love. I learned that before I was gathered in."

Ford did not regard the interruption. "I saw them first at a public exhibition, and I made up my mind that Dr. Boynton was an impostor; and then I went to their house with this belief. I never believed his daughter was anything but his tool, the victim of himself and the woman of the house who did the tricking. I suspected tricking in the dark, but when I attempted to seize her hand it was Miss Boynton's hand that I caught, and I hurt her — like the ruffian I was. Afterwards the old man tried to face me down, and we had a quarrel; and I saw him next that morning here, when he flew at my throat. It 's been his craze to suppose that I thwarted his control over his daughter, and he has regarded me as his deadliest enemy. Now you can tell how much love is lost between us." Ford turned scornfully away and walked the length of the room.

The Shaker remained in his place. "Egeria is

of a very affectionate and believing disposition. She would take a pleasure in forgiving any unkindness, and she would forgive it so that it would never have been. I don't see any cause in what you say to change my mind. If you told me that you did not care for her, it would be far more to the point than all you could say to show *why* you don't."

Ford stopped, and glared at the serene figure and placid countenance. "This is too much," he began, and then he paused, and they regarded each other.

"You don't pretend now," resumed Elihu, "that you suspect either of them of wrong."

"No!"

"Then, whatever the mystery is about them, you know that they are good folks. We have had much more cause than you to suspect them, but I don't doubt them any more than I doubt myself."

"I would stake my life on her truth!" exclaimed Ford. The Shaker could not repress the glimmer of a smile. "I" — Ford paused. Then he burst out, "I have been a hypocrite, — the worst kind; a hypocrite to my own deceit! I *do* love her! She is dearer to me than — You talk of your angelic life! Can you dream of anything nearer the bliss of heaven than union with such tenderness and mercy as hers?"

"We say nothing against marriage in its place. A true marriage is the best thing in the earthly order. But it *is* of the earthly order. The angels neither marry nor are given in marriage. We seek to be perfect, as we are divinely bidden. If you choose to be less than perfect" —

"There can be no higher choice than love like hers. Do you assume" —

"Nay," said the Shaker, "I assume nothing. The time has been when we hoped that Egeria might be gathered in. But that time is past. She could now never be one of us without suffering that we could not ask her to undergo. She must follow the leadings of her own heart, now."

"Why, man, you have no right to say that she cares anything for me. It 's atrocious; it 's" —

"We pass no censure upon the feeling between you," said Elihu quietly, looking into his hat, as if he were about to put it on. "All we ask is that you will not let the sight of your affection be a snare to those whose faces should be set against such things."

Ford regarded him with a stormy look; but he controlled himself, and asked coldly, "What do you wish me to do?"

"Nay; that is for you to decide."

"Well, I must go away!" Ford irefully stared at the Shaker again. "But how can I go away? If there was ever any reason why I should remain, the reason is now stronger than ever."

"Yee," said Elihu.

"What shall I do? If I have not been strong enough and honest enough with myself to keep from drifting into this — this affair, it is not likely that I can get out of it, — I don't want to get out of it! Do you suppose that now I have the hope of her I wish to leave her? Whatever her father's state is,

and whatever my duty to him is, I am bound to stay here for her sake till she sends me away. It 's my duty, it 's my privilege."

Elihu was not visibly swept from his feet by this lover's-logic. He said gravely, "Now you consult your inclination rather than your sense of duty. Friend Boynton and his daughter are here by virtue of the charity we use towards all" —

"You shall be paid every cent!" cried Ford impulsively.

"Nay, I did n't boast," said the Shaker, with a gentle reproof in his tone, which put the young man to shame, "and I did n't merit this return from you. I merely stated a fact. You are yourself here by our concession as their friend. I have opened our mind to you upon this matter, and you know just how we feel. Farewell."

XXIV.

In his preoccupation Ford let Elihu find his way out, and heard him stumbling and groping about for the outer door in the dark. All night the words and circumstances of the interview burned in his heart, and his face was hot with a transport half shameful and half sweet. Once he tried to think when his old misgivings had vanished, but he could not; he only remembered them to spurn them. In the morning he went out for a long walk, and visited the places where he had been with her. He had a formless fear and hope that he might meet her; these conflicting emotions resolved themselves into the resignation with which he went to the shop where Elihu was at work.

"I am going away. I have no right to stay here; it 's a violation of your rights, and it 's a profanation of her. I shall go away, but I shall never give up the hope of speaking to her at the right time and place, and asking her to be my wife."

Seeing that he expected an answer, Elihu said, "You cannot do less."

Ford did not quite like the answer. "You don't understand. I hope for nothing, — I have no reason to hope for anything."

"Nay," said the Shaker, "I don't understand that. She is fond of you."

Ford reddened, but he did not resent the words. "What I propose to do now — to-day — is to go away, and to come back from time to time, with your leave, and see how Dr. Boynton is doing. I should like some of you to write to me, — I should like to write to her. Would you have any objection to that? You don't object to the fact, but to the appearance in this — affair, as I understand. The letters could come under cover to Sister Frances," he submissively suggested.

"Nay," answered the Shaker, after deliberation, "I don't see how we could object to that."

"Thanks," said Ford, with a nervous sigh. "I hope you will feel it right that I should see Dr. Wilson, and ask his opinion of Dr. Boynton's condition, before I go?"

"Yee. There is Dr. Wilson, now." Elihu leaned out and beckoned to him, and the doctor, who was turning away from the office gate, stopped his horse in the middle of the street. "You can ask him now; he has just seen Friend Boynton." Elihu delicately refrained from joining Ford in going to speak with the doctor.

"I have to go away for a while," said the young man, abruptly, "and I wanted to ask you whether there is any immediate danger in Dr. Boynton's case to prevent my going. I shouldn't like to leave him at a critical moment."

"No," said the doctor, with the slowness of his

thought. "It 's one of those obscure cases. I find him very well, — very well, indeed, considering. It 's the nature of his disease to make this sort of pause. It 's often a very long pause."

Ford went back to Elihu, whom he found quietly at work again. "He says there 's no reason why I should n't go," he reported, with the excitement of a new purpose in his face. He waited a moment before he added, "I must go and tell Dr. Boynton, now. I confess I don't know exactly how to do it."

"Yee, it will be quite a little cross," Elihu admitted.

"Do you think," asked Ford, after a moment's abstraction, "that there would be anything wrong in speaking to him about — what we have spoken of?"

"Nay," said Elihu. "I was thinking that perhaps you might like to do that. It would set his mind at rest, perhaps."

"Thank you," said Ford, but he bit his nail in perplexity and hesitation.

"I presume that will be quite a cross, too," added Elihu, quaintly.

Ford stared at him without perceiving his jest. "I suppose you don't know what you 've done in giving me the sort of hope you have! If you have mocked a drowning man with a straw" —

Rapt as he was in his own thoughts, when he entered the sick man's room he could not but be aware of some great change in Boynton. When they had last seen each other, Boynton had sat up

in an arm-chair to receive his visitor. Now he was stretched upon the bed, and he looked very old and frail.

"Why, the doctor said you were better!" cried the young man.

"So I am, — or so I was, half an hour ago," replied Boynton. "I am glad you have come early to-day. I missed you yesterday; and there is something now on which I want the light of your clearest judgment. Sit down," he said politely, seeing that Ford had remained on foot.

The young man mechanically drew up a chair, and sat facing him.

"I have heard a story of Agassiz," Boynton said, "to the effect that when he had read some book wholly upsetting a theory he had labored many years to establish, he was so glad of the truth that his personal defeat was nothing to him. He exulted in his loss, because it was the gain of science. I have not the magnanimity of Agassiz, I find, though I have tried to pursue my inquiries in the same spirit of scientific devotion. Perhaps I had a great deal more at stake: there is a difference between seeking to ascertain some fact of natural science and endeavoring to place beyond question the truth of a future existence."

He plainly expected some sort of acquiescence, and Ford cleared his throat to assent to the preposterous vanity of his speech: "Certainly."

"You will bear me witness," said Boynton, "that I have readily, even cheerfully, relinquished

positions which I had carefully taken and painfully built upon, so long as their loss did not lead to doubt of this great truth, — did not weaken the citadel, so to speak."

"Yes," said Ford, with blank expectancy.

"You know I have rested my hopes upon a power, which I believed my daughter to possess, of communicating with the world of spirits?"

"Yes."

"You remember that I abandoned without a murmur the hypothesis of your adverse control when that was no longer tenable?"

He was so anxious for Ford's explicit assent that the young man again answered, "Yes."

"And when I was forced to accept the conclusion that her power was limited by a certain nervous condition, and had forever passed away with her restoration to complete health, did you find any childish disposition in me to shrink from the truth?"

"No," said Ford, "I did not."

"I thank you!" cried Boynton. "These successive strokes, hard as they were to bear, had nothing mortal to my hopes in them. Now, I have had my death-blow." Ford began a kindly dissent; but Boynton waved him to silence. "Unless your trained eye can see some way out of the conclusions to which I am now brought, I must give up the whole hypothesis of communion with disembodied life, and with that hypothesis my belief in that life itself. In other words, I have received my death-blow."

No doubt Boynton still enjoyed his own rhetoric, and had a measurable consolation in his powers of graphic statement; but there was a real passion in his words, and the young man was moved by the presence of a veritable despair. "What facts, or reasons, have brought you to your conclusions?" he asked.

Boynton pushed his hand up under his pillow, and drew out an old copy of a magazine. "Here is what might have saved me years of research and of hopes as futile as those of the seekers for the philosopher's stone, if I had seen it in time." Though he laid the book on the coverlet, he kept his hand on it, and had evidently no intention that Ford should look at it for himself. "There is a paper in this magazine giving an account of a girl, in this very region, possessing powers so identical in all essentials with those of my daughter that there can be no doubt of their common origin. Wherever this unhappy creature appeared the most extraordinary phenomena attended her: raps were evoked; tables were moved; bells were rung; flashes of light were seen; and violent explosions were heard. The writer was not blinded by the fool's faith that lured me on. He sought a natural cause for these unnatural effects, and he found that by insulating the posts of the girl's bedstead — for these things mostly occurred during her sleep — he controlled them perfectly. She was simply surcharged with electricity. After a while she fell into a long sickness, from which she imperfectly re-

covered, and she died in a mad-house." Boynton removed his hand from the magazine, as if to let Ford now see for himself, and impressively waited his movement.

"Excuse me," said the young man, who found the parallel extremely distasteful, "but I don't see the identity of the cases. Miss Boynton seems the perfection of health, and" —

"Yes," interrupted Boynton, "there is that merciful difference. But I cannot base my self-forgiveness upon that. So far as my recklessness is concerned, her health and her sanity might have been sacrificed where her childhood has been wasted and her happiness destroyed. Poor girl! Poor girl!"

"I think you exaggerate," Ford began, but Boynton interrupted him: —

"Oh, you don't know, you don't know! I could n't exaggerate the sum of her sufferings at my hands. To be wrenched from a home in which she was simply happy, and from love that was immeasurably wiser and more unselfish than mine; to be thrust on to the public exhibition of abnormal conditions that puzzled and terrified her; to be made the partner of my defeat and shame; to be forced to share my aimless vagabondage and abject poverty, houseless, friendless, exposed to suspicion and insult and danger, — that is the fate to which I brought her; and for what? For a delusion that ends in chaos! Oh, my God! And here I lie at last, a sick beggar, sheltered by the charity of these

Shakers, whose kindness I have insulted, and a sorrow and shame to the child whose young life I have blighted, — here I lie, stripped to the last shred of hope in anything, here or hereafter. Oh, young man! I once thought that you were hard upon me, and I resented the blame you spoke as outrage; but now I confess it merciful justice. You have your triumph!"

"Don't say that!" cried Ford. "I never was more ashamed of what I said to you there in Boston than I am at this moment, and I never felt the need of your kindness so much. I believe that if Miss Boynton were here, and understood it all, she would feel nothing but pity" —

"Oh, does that make it different? Does that right the wrong which has been done?"

"Yes," cried the young man, with a fervor that came he knew not how or whence, "forgiveness *does* somehow right a wrong! It must be so, or else this world is not a world of possibilities and recoveries, but a hopeless hell. Why, look!" He spoke as if Egeria were before them. "Have you ever seen her stronger, younger, more" — The image he had conjured up seemed to shine upon him with a smile that reflected itself upon his lips, and a thrill of tenderness passed through him. "No one could do her harm that her own goodness could n't repair."

Boynton was not one to refuse the comfort of such rapture. "Yes, you are right. She *is* unharmed by all that she has suffered. I have at

least that comfort." Then he underwent a quick relapse. "But whether I have harmed her or not, the fact remains that she had never any supernatural power, and I return through all my years of experiment and research to the old ground, — the ground which I once occupied, and which you have never left, — the ground of materialism. It is doubtless well to have something under the foot, if it is only a lump of lifeless adamant."

"I find it hard not to imagine something better than this life when I think of Miss Boynton!" exclaimed Ford impetuously.

"Very true," said the doctor, accepting the tribute without perceiving the passion in it; "there has always been that suggestion of diviner goodness in her loving, self-devoted nature. But she had no more supernatural power than you or I, and the whole system of belief which I had built upon the hypothesis of its existence in her lies a heap of rubbish. And here at death's door I am without a sense of anything but darkness and the void beyond." A silence ensued, which Boynton broke with a startling appeal: "In the name of God, — in the name of whatever is better and greater than ourselves, — give me some hope! Speak! Say something from your vantage-ground of health and strength! Let me have some hope. I am not a coward. I am not afraid of torment. I should not be afraid of it if I had ever willed wrong to any living creature, and I know that I have not. But this darkness rushing back upon me, after years of faith

and surety — it 's unendurable ! Give me some hope ! A word comes from you at times that does not seem of your own authority : speak ! Say it ! "

" You have the hope that the world has had for eighteen hundred years," answered Ford, deeply moved.

" Was that first in your thoughts ? " Boynton swiftly rejoined. " Was it all you could think of ? "

" It was first in my thoughts, it was all I could think of," repeated Ford.

" But you have rejected that hope."

" It left me. It seemed to have left me. I don't realize it now as a faith, but I realize that it was always present somewhere in me. It may be different with those who come after us, to whom it will never have been imparted ; but we who were born in it, — how can we help it, how can we escape it ? "

" Is that really true ? " mused Boynton aloud. " Do we come back only to that at last ? Have you ever spoken with a clergyman about it ? "

" Oh, no ! " cried Ford.

" I should like to talk with a clergyman — I should like to talk with the church about it ! There must be something in organization — But it is of no use, now ! Theories, theories, theories ! A thousand formulas repeat themselves to me ; the air is full of them ; I can read and hear them." He put his hands under his head and clasped them there. " And there is absolutely nothing else but that ? Nothing in science ? "

"No."

"Nothing of hope in the new metaphysics?"

"No, nothing."

"Nothing in the philosophy that applies the theories of science to the moral world?"

"Nothing but death."

"Then that *is* the only hope, — that old story of a credulous and fabulous time, resting upon hearsay and the witness of the ignorant, the pedantic wisdom of the learned, the interest of a church lustful of power; and that allegory of the highest serving the lowest, the best suffering for the worst, — that is still the world's only hope!" He paused; and then he recurred to the thought which he had dropped: "A clergyman, — a priest! — I should like to know the feelings of such a man. He fulfills an office with which his order has been clothed for two thousand years; he bears the tradition of authority which is as old as the human race; he claims to derive from Christ himself the touch of blessing and of healing for the broken spirit. I have often thought of that, — what a sacred and awful commission it must be, if we admit its divine origin! Yes, I should like to know the feelings of such a man. I wonder if he feels his authority perpetually reconsecrated by the anguish, the fears, the prayers, the trembling hopes, of all those who have lain upon beds of death, or wept over them! Poor human soul, it should make him superhuman! What a vast cumulative power of consolation must come to a priest in our time! He is the church in-

carnate, the vicar of Christ, the helpful brother of the helpless human race, — it 's a tremendous thought. I should like to talk with such a man."

"Would you really like to see a minister?" asked Ford. "Because" —

"No, — no," said Boynton. "At least, not now, not yet; not till I have clearly formulated my ideas. But there are certainly some points that I should like to discuss — Oh, words, words! Phrases, phrases, — this glibness tires me to death! I can't get any foot-hold on it — I slip on it as if it were ice." He lay in a silence which Ford did not interrupt, and which he broke himself at last in a mood of something like philosophical cheerfulness: "I can find reason, if not consolation, for my failure, — reason in the physical world. I shall take the first opportunity of committing my ideas to paper. Has it never struck you as very extraordinary that all the vast mass of evidence which has been accumulating in favor of spiritualism for the last twenty years, until now it is literally immense, should have no convincing power whatever with those who have not been convinced by their own senses? Why should I, as soon as personal proof failed me, instantly lapse from faith in it?"

"I am afraid," Ford said, "that I have not thought sufficiently about the matter."

"I believe I can explain why," Boynton continued. "It is because it is not spiritualism at all, but materialism, — a grosser materialism than that which denies; a materialism that asserts and af-

firms, and appeals for proof to purely physical phenomena. All other systems of belief, all other revelations of the unseen world, have supplied a rule of life, have been given for our *use* here. But this offers nothing but the barren fact that we live again. If it has had any effect upon morals, it has been to corrupt them. I cannot see how it is better in its effect upon this world than sheer atheism. It is as thoroughly godless as atheism itself, and no man can accept it upon any other man's word, because it has not yet shown its truth in the ameliorated life of men. It leaves them where it found them, or else a little worse for the conceit with which it fills them. Yes, yes; I see now. I see it all."

The vigor of his speculative power buoyed him triumphantly above the abyss into which other men would have sunk. Ford listened with the fascination which the peculiar workings of Boynton's mind had always had for him, and he felt his heart warm towards him with sympathy that was at once respectful and amused, as he thus constructed a new theory out of the ruin of all his old theories.

"All the research in that direction," Boynton presently continued, "has been upon a false basis, and if anything has been granted it has been in mockery of an unworthy hope. I wonder that I was never struck before by that element of derision in it. The Calvinist gets Calvinism, the Unitarian Unitarianism; each carries away from communion with spirits the things that he brought. If men live again, it has been found that they live only in

a frivolous tradition of their life in this world. Poor creatures! they seem lamed of half themselves, — the better half that aspires and advances; they hover in a dull stagnation, just above this ball of mire; they have nothing to tell us; they bring us no comfort and no wisdom. Annihilation is better than such an immortality!"

Ford saw that Boynton did not expect any comment from him, and he did not interrupt his monologue. "What I ought to have asked was not whether there was a life hereafter, but whether there was a life hereafter worth living. I stopped short of the vital question. I fancied that it was essential to men to know surely that they should live again; but now I recognize that it is not essential in itself." He lay musing a while, and then resumed, "I had got them to bring me a Bible before you came in. I wanted to consult it upon a point raised by Elihu, yesterday. There are a great many new ideas in the Bible," he added, simply; "a great many new ideas in Job, and David, and Ecclesiastes, and Paul, — a *great* many in Paul. Would you mind handing it to me from the table? Oh, thanks!" he said, as he took the volume which Ford rose to give him. "This old record, which keeps the veil drawn so close, and lets the light I wanted glimmer out so sparely in a few promises and warnings, against the agonized passion of the Cross, or flings the curtain wide upon the sublime darkness of the Apocalypse, is very clear upon this point. It tells us that we shall live

hereafter in the blessing of our good will and the curse of our evil will; the question whether we shall live at all is left in abeyance, as if it were too trivial for affirmation. What a force it has, as it all comes back! I seem to have thought of it for the first time. And what a proof of its truth there is in our experience here! We shall reap as we have sown, and so much is sown which we cannot reap here — And if I should be doomed to spend eternity in asking whether I be really alive! No, no; God does n't make a jest of us." He turned to Ford. "I am curious," he said, "to know how this strikes you, as you sit here in the full possession of your powers. I know very well, and you know, how men in their extremity are apt to turn back to the faith taught them at their mother's knees; and perhaps the common experience is repeating itself in my case. But you are in no such extremity. Does there seem to be any truth here?" He laid his hand on the book, and looked intently at Ford.

"It seems to be all the truth of the sort that there is."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Boynton.

"I express myself badly. But it 's hard to express yourself well on this matter. I mean to say that whatever truth there was in that record has not been surpassed or superseded."

"And is that all you have to say?"

"That 's all I could say till I had looked into the question. It seems to me that it is all any one could say."

"No doubt," said Boynton, with disappointment, "from your stand-point, — from the scientific stand-point. You say that there is nothing else, but you imply that this is not much."

"No," said Ford, "I think it 's a great deal. I think it ought to be enough, if one cares" —

"That 's the scientific attitude!" cried Boynton; "that 's the curse of the scientific attitude! You do not deny, but you ask, 'What difference?'"

"At least," said Ford, with a smile, "you can let even such a poor representative of the scientific side as I am be glad that you see the fallacy of spiritualism."

"Oh, I don't pronounce it a fallacy," returned Boynton. "I only say that it has proved fallacious in my hands, and that as long as it is used merely to establish the fact of a future life it will remain sterile. It will continue to be doubted, like a conjurer's trick, by all who have not seen it; and those who see it will afterwards come to discredit their own senses. The world has been mocked with something of the kind from the beginning; it 's no new thing. Perhaps the hope of absolute assurance is given us only to be broken for our rebuke. Life is not so long at the longest that we need be impatient. If we wake, we shall know; if we do not wake, we shall not even know that we have not awakened." He added, "It is very curious, very strange, indeed, but the only thing that I have got by all this research is the one great thing which it never included, — which all research of the kind ignores."

Ford perceived that he wished him to ask what this was, and he said, "What is that?"

"God," replied Boynton. "It may be through an instinctive piety that we forbear to inquire concerning him of those earth-bound spirits. What could they know of him? Many pure and simple souls in this world must be infinitely nearer him. But out of all that chaos I have reached him. No, I am not where I started: I have come in sight of him. I was anxious to know whether we should live hereafter; but whether we live or not, now I know that he lives, and he will take care. We need not be troubled. As for the dead, perhaps we shall go to them, but surely they shall not return to us. That seems true, does n't it?"

"It 's all the truth there is," said Ford.

Boynton smiled. "You are an honest man. You won't say more than you think. I like you for that. I have a great wish to ask your forgiveness."

"My forgiveness? I have nothing to forgive!"

"Oh, yes. I involved you in the destiny of a mistaken and willful man; I afflicted you with the superstitious manias of a lunatic who fancied that he was seeking the truth when he was only seeking himself. I have burdened you with a sense of my wish that you should stay here, because I still hoped to work out something to my own glory and advantage" —

"I never knew it; I can't think it," interrupted Ford. "It was my privilege to stay. These have

been the best days of my life, — the happiest." He stopped; he believed that Boynton must know the meaning that rushed from his heart into the words; but the old man evidently found only a conventional kindliness in them.

"Thank you," he said. "It is very strange to find you my friend after all, and to meet you on common ground, — I who have wandered so far round, and you who have continued forward with none of my aims. It would be interesting if a third could stand with us. I should like to see how far a minister of the gospel could come towards us. I should like to talk with a minister: not a theologian, but an ecclesiastic, — some one who embodied and represented the idea of a church."

"Do you mean a Catholic priest?" asked Ford.

"No, not that, — not just that; but still some one in whom the priestly character prevailed."

"I will be glad to gratify any wish you have in the matter, Dr. Boynton," said Ford. "I imagine it would be easy to get a clergyman to visit you from the village, and I'll go to any one you want to see."

"Well, not now, — not now. Not to-day. Perhaps to-morrow. I should like to think it over first. I may have some new light by that time. I should like to look up some other points, here. There is a text somewhere in Paul — it is a long time since I read it — Wait! 'We are saved by hope. But hope that is seen' — *that is seen* — 'is *not* hope; for what a man seeth' — Very significant, very significant!" he added, more to himself

than to Ford. "*Saved!* Really, there seems to have been no question with them about the mere existence!" He lay quiet for a long time, with his hands folded behind his head, and a dreamy light was in his eyes. Ford heard the ticking of an insect in the wainscot. "Who is it," Boynton asked suddenly, "that speaks of the undiscovered country?"

"Hamlet," replied Ford.

"It might have been Job, — it might have been Ecclesiastes, — or David. 'The undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns.' Is that it?"

"Yes. They commonly misquote it," added Ford mechanically.

"I know; they leave out *bourn*. They say, the undiscovered country whence no traveler returns. But it 's the same thing. Yes; and Hamlet says no traveler returns, when he believes that he has just seen his father's spirit! The ghost that comes back to prove itself can't hold him to a belief in its presence after the heated moment of vision is past! We *must* doubt it; we are better with no proof. Yes; yes! The undiscovered country — thank God, it can be what those babblers say! The undiscovered country — what a weight of doom is in the words — and hope!"

One of the sisters came in, and he seemed to forget Ford, who presently went away with an absent-minded salutation from him. Boynton had taken up the book, and while the sister propped his head with the pillows, he fluttered the leaves with impatient hands.

XXV.

At the gate Ford turned towards Elihu's shop, intending to explain why he had not been able to speak of Egeria to her father. In his liberation from Boynton's appeals for sympathy, his thoughts thronged back to her; he framed a thousand happy phrases, in which he opened his heart, and she always answered as he wished. His face burned with the joyful shame of these thoughts, and he did not hear his name the first time it was called from a buggy standing at the office gate. The gay voices had hailed him a third time when he looked round, and slowly recognized Phillips and Mrs. Perham making frantic signs to him from the vehicle. They laughed at his stupefaction, and his sense of their intrusion mounted as he dragged himself across the street. Mrs. Perham leant out of the buggy and gave him her hand.

"*Well*, Mr. Ford! Is this the way you receive your friends? We have been chasing all over this outlandish place for you; we have spent an hour with the sisters here, and have questioned them down to the quick, so that we know all about you; and we were just going to drive away in despair without seeing you."

"I 'm very unfortunate," said Ford.

"To be caught at the last moment? How *good* you always are! You don't know how I 've pined for your little speeches; they 're tonic. *Yes*, Mr. Ford!" she cried, with a daring laugh, "Mr. Perham is *very* well, for him, — I knew you were going to ask! — or I should n't be philandering about the country in this way." Ford glanced at Phillips, who trifled with the reins and looked sheepish.

"You should have gone over to Egerton before this, my dear fellow," he said. "There have been some charming people over there."

"*Have* been! His modesty," cried Mrs. Perham, "and my humility! *We* are at Egerton yet, Mr. Ford!"

"Oh, certainly. But Ford has us in Boston."

"Ah, very true," said Mrs. Perham. "There was quite a little buzz of excitement for a while, when Mr. Phillips first explained the romantic circumstances. The young ladies drove over the next Sunday to Shaker meeting, on purpose to interview you, but they had n't the courage. It was one of Mr. Perham's bad days, or I should have come, too; and we should have sent Mr. Phillips over long ago, if there had been any Mr. Phillips to send. But he 's only just got back to Egerton."

"Yes, my dear fellow, I carried out our little programme to the letter, — I wish I could say to the spirit; but your defection prevented. I found Butler at Egerton, and he jumped at the chance of

driving on with me, in a manner that made your flattering consent seem nothing. We drove to Greenfield, and then followed up the valley of the Connecticut. It was indescribable, my dear friend. You have lost no end of material. I must really try to reproduce it for you some time. I thought of you often. I was always saying, 'Now, if Ford were here!' Two or three times I was actually on the point of writing to you. But you know how *that* is; you never wrote to *me*. I'm very glad to hear from our sisters, here, that the old gentleman is better. Is he still in his craze?" Phillips spoke with anxious rapidity, and with a certain propitiation of manner; but Ford did not relax the displeasure of the looks with which he had heard of his explanation of the romantic circumstances.

"You ought to get something out of him; you ought to write him up; he 'd make a capital paper," said Mrs. Perham. "I shall be on the lookout for him in your articles. And your Shaker experiences! The young ladies were sure you had turned Shaker, Mr. Ford, and they picked you out in the dance. We had *such* fun over it!" She continued, pulling down the corners of her mouth, "Oh, but we were all very *respectful*, Mr. Ford. We admired your self-devotion in staying here; especially, as you could n't *esteem* them."

"I don't know what you mean," began Ford, with a sternness that would have silenced a less frivolous spirit.

"Why, have n't you *heard?*" cried Mrs. Perham,

leaning forward, and dropping her tone confidentially, while Phillips made some inarticulate attempts to hinder her speaking. "The poor old gentleman was quite tipsy that morning when they stopped up there at that country hotel, and they had to be turned out-of-doors. Is it possible you have n't heard that?"

"Yes, I 've heard that," said Ford.

"I always said," continued Mrs. Perham, "it was cruel to the girl; for she was n't responsible for her father's habits, poor thing. Then of course you don't believe it?"

"No!"

"And you believe that all those manifestations took place there?"

"No!"

"An armed neutrality! Well, it 's the only tenable position, and I shall take it myself in regard to the *other* affair. I never thought how convenient it must be."

Phillips found his voice: "Mrs. Perham, it 's delightful chatting here; but I have to remind you that we shall be late for dinner if we stay any longer."

"Oh, that 's true," admitted Mrs. Perham. "Good-by, Mr. Ford. Do come over and see us, if you can tear yourself away from your protégés for a few hours. It 's very strange, his lingering along so! Good-by!"

"Good-by, my dear friend!" said Phillips, trying to throw some exculpation into his afflicted face.

"I am going back to Boston at the end of the week. Can I do anything for you there?" He did not wait for an answer, but lifted the reins and chirruped to his horse.

Ford caught the wheel in his hand, and stopped it. "Hold on!" he said, quite white in the face. "What other affair, Mrs. Perham?"

"Other affair?" she repeated. "Oh! about the water-proof, you know."

"No, I don't know about the water-proof. What do you mean?"

"Is it possible the Shakers have n't told you? Perhaps they did n't think it worth mentioning. You know your friends — I forget the name; Boyntons? — had passed the night before they reached the Elm Tavern in a school-house up here; and the teacher found them there in the morning, and lent the young lady her water-proof. They were to send it back from Vardley Station; but as they never went to Vardley Station they naturally never sent it back."

"I don't believe it!" cried Ford.

"Mr. Phillips always told me you were a terrible skeptic!" said Mrs. Perham. "I merely had the story from the mother of the school-teacher, herself! We happened to stop at her house to ask the way, and when we inquired if the Boyntons were still here she came out with this story. She 's a very voluble old lady. I dare say she tells it to every one. What is your theory about it?"

Ford released the wheel which he had been grip-

ping, and, giving it a contemptuous push, turned away without a word.

Mrs. Perham craned her head round to look back after him. "What a natural man!" she said, with sincere admiration. "He 's perfectly fascinating." She burst into a laugh. "Poor Mr. Phillips! He looked as if he wished you had been my authority."

Phillips shrugged his shoulders, and said dryly, "I hope you are satisfied, Mrs. Perham."

"Why, no, I am not," she candidly owned, with a touch of real regret in her voice. "I only meant to tease him; but if he 's in love with her, I suppose he 'll take it to heart."

"In love with whom?" asked Phillips.

"Sister Diantha."

Phillips stared at her.

"Well, with this medium, then, — this Medea, Ashtaroth, Egeria, — *I* don't know what her name is." As Phillips continued to stare at her, Mrs. Perham gave a shriller laugh. "Really, *you* are a man, too. I shall never dare take on such easy terms with you again, Mr. Phillips, — never! I don't wonder men can't understand women: they don't understand their own simple sex. Of *course* he 's in love with her, and must have been from the first."

"Well, then, allow me to say, Mrs. Perham, that if you think he 's in love with Miss Boynton I don't quite see what your object was. I felt that it was an intrusion to come over here, at the best."

"Oh, thanks, Mr. Phillips!"

"And it appears to me that it was extraneous to repeat those stories to him."

"Extraneous is good! And you have an ally in my own conscience, Mr. Phillips. I wanted to see a natural man under the influence of a strong emotion, and I don't like it, I think. I did n't suppose he was so serious about her. But I don't believe any harm 's done. He won't give her up on account of what I 've said; and if he does perhaps she ought to be given up." Phillips dealt the horse a cut of the whip, and left the talk to Mrs. Perham, as they drove away.

In the dull first half-hour after dinner, while she sat absently feeling on the porcelain-toned piano in the hotel parlor for the music of the past, two ladies who wished to see her were announced. One of these visitors proved to be a Shaker sister, whom Mrs. Perham recognized, and who introduced her companion, a short, squarely built young woman, as Miss Thorn.

They took seats, though Mrs. Perham had risen and remained standing, and Miss Thorn said without preamble, "I teach in the school-house in Vardley, where Dr. Boynton stopped this spring. I heard from my mother this noon that a lady and gentleman had been asking the way to the Shaker Village, who seemed to know Dr. Boynton."

"No, I don't know him," said Mrs. Perham.

Phillips came forward, from a corner of the parlor. "I know Dr. Boynton; at least I saw him and Miss Boynton in Boston once."

"I thought," said Miss Thorn, "that I ought to come and tell you that my mother did n't understand about that — that water-proof."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Perham; "we thought it so curious."

"I was sure," said Phillips, with an attempted severity, "that there was some mistake." The severity had no apparent effect upon Mrs. Perham, but Miss Thorn, who had been talking in some sort to both, now addressed herself wholly to him: —

"I was away from home when you stopped to-day. I thought you would like to know there was a misunderstanding. The water-proof was as much a gift as anything; though that would n't have excused them if they had thought I wanted it again. But anybody could see that Miss Boynton was stupid then with the fever, and did n't half know where she was or what she was doing. She had been walking late the night before through the snow, and they had slept on the benches before the stove." Phillips bowed, and looked at Miss Thorn, who resumed with increasing stiffness: "I never wondered at *his* not remembering it; he seemed too flighty for anything. I knew they were here all summer at the Shakers'. I don't," said Miss Thorn, "pass any judgment on my mother for the way she looked at it; but I 'd have given anything if she had n't spoken." The tears started to her eyes, and she bit her lip as she rose.

"It did n't make any difference to us," said Diantha, who had hitherto sat a silent and inscrutable

glimmer of spectacles in the depths of her Shaker bonnet. "It got hung up among our things while she was sick, and when she got well she could n't seem to remember about it. She thought she must have brought it from the cars with her for her own."

Miss Thorn waited, and then resumed stiffly, "I never suspected or blamed them the least bit. As soon as I could, I went over to the Shakers' to see about it, and told them the way I felt, and that I wanted to come to you. Diantha felt as if she would like to come with me, and I brought her. That's all." Miss Thorn rose with a personal primness that by contrast almost softened the Shaker primness of Diantha into ceremony.

Phillips experienced the rush of an emotion which, upon subsequent analysis, he knew to be of unquestionable genuineness. "My dear young lady," he said, "I ask you to do me the justice to believe that I never had an injurious suspicion of Miss Boynton. Her father had attempted a line of life that naturally subjected himself and her to question, but I never doubted them. I have a positive pleasure in disbelieving anything to their disadvantage in connection with — with — your generous behavior to them. Did — did Mr. Ford speak of the matter to you? Did he wish any expression from me in their behalf? Because" —

"He no need to ask anything as far as *we 're* concerned," interposed Diantha.

"No," said Phillips. "I can only repeat that *I*

was sure there was a misunderstanding, and that you 've done us a favor in coming. Is there any way in which I could be of use to Dr. Boynton? I should be most happy if I thought there was."

Miss Thorn left the reply to Diantha, who said as they went out, "There ain't anything as I know of."

"Really," commented Mrs. Perham, "this is edifying. I have n't felt so put down for a *long* while. I don't see what more we could do, unless we joined with Miss Thorn and Sister Diantha in presenting Miss Boynton with a piece of plate, as a slight token of gratitude for her noble example in borrowing a water-proof and keeping it. She has classed the water-proof with the umbrella, as a thing not to be returned. Is that the principle? Well, if Mr. Ford is going to marry her" —

"Going to marry her!" cried Phillips.

"Why, of course. Did you think anything else? Is marriage such an unnatural thing?"

"No. But Ford's marrying is."

"That remains to be seen. If he 's going to marry her, he can't believe in her too thoroughly. I 've an idea that the Pythoness is insipid; but if Mr. Ford likes insipidity, I want him to have it. I think we ought to drive over to the Shakers', and assure him in person that we did n't believe anything, and we did n't mean anything. You shall do all the talking, this time; you talk so well."

"Thanks," said Phillips, "I suspect I 've done my last talking to Ford."

"And you won't go?" demanded Mrs. Perham, with a laugh. "Then I must go alone, some day. Meantime, I know how to keep a secret. I hope Miss Thorn may be able to teach her mother."

XXVI.

Ford stood still, looking at the ground, while Phillips and Mrs. Perham drove away. His impulse to pluck Phillips from his place, and make him pay in person for that woman's malice, was still so vividly present in his nerves that he seemed to have done it; but when the misery of Phillips's face, intensifying as Mrs. Perham went on from bad to worse, recurred to him, he broke into a laugh.

Sister Frances came out of the office. "Friend Edward," she said, "was that wicked woman speakin' to you about Egery?"

"Yes."

"Don't you believe her! Don't you believe a word she said!" cried the Shakeress, with hot looks of indignation. "I know just how it all happened" —

"I don't wish to know. I should feel disgraced if I let you tell me. Whatever happened, this woman lied. Where is Egeria?"

"Oh!" cried Frances. "She has gone to Harshire with Rebecca. She won't be back till mornin'." She bent on the young man a look of wistful sympathy.

"Well!" he cried, throwing up his hands desperately, as if the morrow were a time so remote that it never would come, "I must wait."

"She 'd been plannin' to go a long while," Frances apologized, "and her father seemed so well this mornin' she thought she might" —

"Oh, yes, yes!" answered Ford dejectedly. He knew that he somehow had driven her away by his behavior of the day before, and that he had himself to blame for this delay in which he stifled. He turned about, with some wild purpose of following her to Harshire, and speaking to her there, when he heard Frances calling him again: —

"Friend Edward, I don't know as you know that Egery 's expectin' friends to-morrow."

"Friends? No, what friends?" asked Ford. "Has she gone to meet them at Harshire?" he added stupidly.

"Well, no; she only got the letter yesterday. I suppose her father did n't think to tell you of it. I don't know as you ever heard her speak of the young man that come with 'em as far as the Junction that day they missed their train. He was with 'em a while in Boston, and he come from the same place they did, Down East. He 's been twice to find 'em there in Maine, this summer; but he could n't hear any word of 'em till just now. They was children together, Egery and Friend — Well, I never *could* remember names."

"Oh, never mind!" exclaimed Ford, with a deathly pallor. "I know the name, — I know the

man!" And now he turned again, and hurried beyond a second recall from the trouble in which Frances saw him groping down the road, like one in the dark. When he had got out of her sight, he walked a little into the wayside woods, and stumbling to the ground gave himself to the despair which had blackened round him. His first feeling was a generous regret that now he could not let his love speak the contempt in which he held the wrong he had heard done her; this feeling came even before the sense of hopeless loss to which he abandoned himself with a lover's rashness. He meekly owned that the man whom he marveled now that he could ever have forgotten as a rival was one of those in whom women confided, and were not disappointed, — who made constant friends and good husbands; and questioning himself he could not be sure that her happiness would be as safe in his own keeping. He remembered with abject humiliation the last time he had met this man, and the savagery with which he had wreaked upon him the jealousy which he would not then admit to himself, and in which he had refused to consider even her at his prayer. The turmoil went on for hours, but always to this effect. The most that he could hope, when he crept homeward at dusk, sore as if bruised in body by the conflict in his mind, was that he might steal away before he saw them together. With this intent, to which he had worked with difficulty in the chaos of his dreams, he set about putting his books and other belongings together, but he gave up tremu-

lous and exhausted before the work was half done. He fell to thinking again, and this time with a sort of sullen resentment, in which he said to himself that his love had its own rights, and that he would not betray them. It had a right to be heard, at any cost; and he began to despise his purpose of hurrying away as mock-heroic. It was like a character in a lady's novel to leave the field to a rival whom he did not yet know to be preferred; the high humility, in which he had thought to yield Egeria without her explicit authority to a man whom he judged his better, sickened him. He saw that it was for her to choose between them, and it was the part of a coward and a fool to go before she had chosen. As matters stood, he had no right to go; she had a preëminent right to know from him that he loved her.

He hungrily dispatched the supper he had left standing on his table, and then kindled a brush-wood fire on his hearth; he sat down before it in his easy-chair, and stayed by the clearer mind at which he had arrived he experienced a sensual comfort in the blaze. Presently he was aware of drowsing; and then suddenly he awoke. The dawn came in at the windows; he perceived that he had passed the night in his chair. A loud knocking continued at his door, while he gathered his scattered wits together. At length he cried, "Come in!" and the farmer from over the way entered.

"I don't suppose ye know what 's happened?" he said.

"No," said Ford, "I don't, if it 's anything in particular."

"No. Well. I thought may be ye 'd like to know. The old man 's dead. Died sudden this mornin'."

"What? Who? What old man?"

The farmer nodded his head in the direction of the village. "Dr. Boynton. I thought ye 'd like to know it."

"Thank you," said Ford. He rose and stood at one corner of the hearth; the farmer, from the other, stiffly stretched his hard, knotted hand towards the ashes of the dead fire.

Ford went out and walked up through the village, whose familiar aspect was all estranged, as if he himself had died, and were looking upon it from another world. At the office he found a group of Shakers listening to Boynton's physician, who, on his appearance, addressed more directly to him what he was saying of the painless death Boynton must have died in his sleep. "The first part of the night he was very restless, and several times he said that he would like to see you and talk with you; but he would not let them send; said he had n't formulated his ideas yet." The doctor involuntarily smiled in recalling a turn of the phraseology so newly silent forever. "I wonder if he has formulated them now to his satisfaction." Ford made no response, and the doctor asked, "Did he speak to you yesterday of the case of an electrical girl?"

"Yes."

"I inferred as much from something he said, when I saw him in the afternoon. I had lent him the magazine containing the account. He found an analogy between that case and Miss Boynton's that I had not anticipated. It seems to have put a quietus to his belief in her supernatural gifts."

"Yes," Ford assented, as before.

"He told me that it had depressed him to the lowest point. But when I saw him he had quite recovered his spirits." He added thoughtfully, "You can't say that a man dies because he wishes to die; though it sometimes seems as if people could live if they would. When I parted with Dr. Boynton he had what I might call an enthusiasm for death. It might be described in other words as a desire, amounting almost to frenzy, to know whether we live again, and a willingness to gratify that desire at the cost of not living at all."

"He dwelt habitually on that question," said Ford, with difficulty. "But when I talked with him yesterday, he seemed at rest on the main point."

"Yes, I don't know but he was. Perhaps I had better say that he was impatient to verify it. He talked of nothing else during the evening, Sister Frances tells me; though he fell off quietly to sleep at last."

"Well," said Ford drearily, "he *has* verified it now."

"Yes, and in the old way, — the way appointed for all living. He knows now. Did it ever occur

to you, sir," added the doctor, philosophically, "what ignorance all our wisdom is compared with the knowledge of a child that has just died?"

"If it knows anything at all."

"Oh, certainly, — if it *does* know."

"We are *sure* it knows," said Elihu.

They walked out together, and before the doctor mounted his buggy to drive away they stood a moment looking at the closed windows of the infirmary. "It 's useless, now, to talk of causes," said the doctor. "The heart had been affected a long time" —

"He is dead, all the same," said Ford.

"Oh, yes, he is *dead*," assented the doctor. "What I meant to say was that while no human foresight could have prevented the result I confess its suddenness surprised me. One moment he was with us, and the next" —

"He was n't," interrupted Ford, restively. "That 's all we can know: and neither he nor all the myriads that have gone that way can tell us anything more."

"If we suppose him to be somewhere in a state of conscious being," observed the doctor, "we can suppose that reflection to be a trial to him, after a life so much devoted to the effort of working out proof of something different."

"He had been a spiritualist; and not a selfish or ignoble one," answered Ford, oppressed by the doctor's speculative mood, and letting his impatience appear. A voice was in his ears, repeating the

things that Boynton had said. In the pauses of it, he brooded upon the chances that had thrown upon him for sympathy and comfort in his last days the man for whom he had once felt and shown such contempt. The dark irony, the broken meaning, afflicted him, and he lurked about, stunned and helpless, waiting till Egeria should come, and dreading to see the grief in which he had no rights. He thought of her trouble, not of his own; it blotted even his jealousy from his mind, and left him acquiescent in whatever fate befell. The time for what he had intended to do was swept away; he could now only wait passively for events to shape themselves.

Hatch did not come that day, and Ford took such part as Elihu assigned him in the sad business of fulfilling Boynton's wishes. These had been casually expressed from time to time to Frances, and referred to his removal to his old home, where he desired to be laid by the side of his wife. When Hatch arrived, the second morning, he assumed charge of the affair, as a family friend; and Ford, lapsing from all active concern in it, shut himself in his own room, and waited for he knew not what. In the evening, Hatch came to see him. They had already met in the presence of the Shakers, but doubtless neither felt that they had met till now, since their parting in Boston. Hatch received awkwardly the civility which Ford awkwardly showed. He would not sit down, and he said abruptly that he had come to say that Miss Boynton was going

back in the morning to her home in Maine, where the funeral was to be. He added that Frances and Elihu were going with her, on the part of the family; and after a hesitation he said, "Would n't you like to attend the funeral, too?"

"Has she authorized you to invite me?" asked Ford.

"Well, no," said Hatch. "I don't suppose she wanted to put that much of a burden on you. It 's a long ways."

Ford reflected a long time. "You are going, I suppose?"

"Why, of course," said Hatch.

Ford pondered again. "Under the circumstances," he said, "I believe that I ought n't to let my own preference have any weight. Miss Boynton is going with friends to her own home, and I could n't be of any use. I propose to do what I think would be least afflicting to her by not going." He hesitated, and presently added, tentatively, "I believe she would prefer it."

"You ought to know best," said Hatch.

"Well, I believe that I am right. Tell her that I will not try to see her before she goes; but — but — some other time." He said this tentatively, also, and with an odd sort of faltering, as if somehow Hatch might advise him better. "I thank you for coming."

"Well, sir," said the young fellow, standing with his feet squarely apart in the way that Ford had hated him for in Mrs. Le Roy's parlor, "you

must do what you think is best. *I* want to thank *you*, too. Dr. Boynton was a good friend to me, and from all I hear you were a good friend to him, — at last. You 've behaved like a man. They all say here that the doctor could n't have got along without you."

"They overpraise me," said Ford, helped to a melancholy irony by Hatch's simple patronage.

"No, sir," replied Hatch, "I don't think so. And you must have found it pretty tough, feeling the way you did about him."

"No," said Ford, "it was not so tough as it might seem. I liked him. It is n't a logical position; he never squared with my ideas; but I know now that he was a singularly upright and truthful man."

"That 's so, every time," said Hatch.

"I don't care for my consistency in the thing; I 'd rather do him justice. I 've come to his own ground, and yours: I want to say that when I interfered with him there in Boston he had a noble motive, and I had an ignoble one."

"If you 're not firing over my head," said Hatch, "and if I catch your meaning rightly, I 'm bound to confess that the doctor had got mixed up with a pretty queer lot in the course of his researches. But he was all right himself. I pinned my faith to him, right along. But if you mean that you 're going in for anything like spiritualism, I advise you to hush it up among yourself. As far as I 'm concerned, I 've about come to that conclusion. And I think Miss Egeria 's had enough of it."

His mention of her name in this connection was at first puzzling, and at last so offensive to Ford that he found it harder than he had thought to say what he now said. After a dry assent to Hatch's proposition, he added, "I dare say you 're right. Mr. Hatch, I treated you shabbily when we met last. I am sorry for that, and ashamed of it. I should have behaved better, if I had understood better" —

"Oh, I knew how it was, myself," Hatch interrupted. "Or I did when I came to think of it." Ford looked at him as if he did not comprehend his drift; and Hatch continued, "It was pretty rough at the time, but I suppose I should have acted just so, in your place. Well, sir! I hope we part better friends, now," he said, offering his hand. "I think that 's what the old doctor would have liked. Some of his ideas were most too large a fit for this world, but he was pretty practical about others."

Ford took the proffered hand, and followed Hatch to his door, wholly baffled and unsettled. He longed to have it all out with him, but this was not possible, and he submitted as he best could. He had thought himself right in resolving not to follow Egeria home, or vex her with his presence before she went; but he was not sure of this now; and he spent the time intervening before her departure in an anguish of indecision. But he let her go without seeing her, and in the afternoon he went away, too.

XXVII.

He did not go back to his old lodging in Boston, but spent a day at a hotel till he could find other quarters. It was intolerable to think of meeting any one he knew, and he had such a horror of Mrs. Perham's possible return that he asked at the door whether she had come back before he went in to make ready for removal.

When the change was effected, all change seemed forever at an end. The days went by without event; he could not write, but he took up again his study with the practical chemist, and pushed on with that through an unstoried month which brought him through the bluster and chill of September to the mellow heart of October.

A chasm divided him from all that he had been, and he tried to keep from thinking across it. But his mind was full of broken glimpses of the past; of doubts of what he had done; of vague wonder if he should ever hear from her again, and how; of crazy purposes, broken as fast as formed, of going where he might look on her, if it might be only that, and know that she was still in life. There were terrible moments in which his heart was wrung with the possibility that his conjecture had

been all wrong, and that she might be lingering in cruel amaze that he had never made any sign to her, and puzzling over the problem which his refusal to see her, or to stand with her at her father's grave, had left her.

One evening when he came home, he found a flat, square package, which had arrived through the mail after going first to his old address. It was directed in an old-fashioned, round hand, and it yielded softly to the touch with which he fingered it before he tore it open. It proved to hold a handkerchief, which he recognized as his own, fragrantly washed and ironed; and he found a little note pinned to it, and signed F. Plumb, explaining that the handkerchief had been found in his room. While he stood scowling at it, and trying to make out who F. Plumb was, and where he had left the handkerchief, he turned the scrap of paper over, and saw written in pencil on the back, as if the writer had wished to whisper it there, "I do not know as you heard that Egeria is back with us. Frances."

Now he knew, now he understood. All the hopes that had seemed dead sprang to life again.

He caught up a paper, and looked at the time-tables. The last train passing Vardley would leave in fifteen minutes. He turned the key in his door, and two hours later he was rounding the dark point of the wooded hill that intervenes between the station and the Shaker village, where a light sparely twinkled in the window of Elihu's shop. He had

walked, as he supposed, but his pace was more like a run from the train; and his heart thundered in his ears as he sat and panted on Elihu's door-step, trying to gather courage to go in. At last he went in without the courage.

Elihu was amazed, certainly, but hardly disquieted. He shut upon his thumb the book that he was reading, and pushed his spectacles above his forehead. "Friend Ford!" he said.

"Yes!" answered the young man, still striving for breath, as he pressed the Shaker's hand. "I have come — I have come" —

"Yee," Elihu assented; "sit down. We did not expect you, but the family will be glad to see you. Have you kept your health?"

"Is she well? Is she going to stay with you? When did she come back?" The questions thronged upon one another faster than he could utter them, and he stopped perforce again.

"I suppose you mean Egeria. Yee, she is well. She came back last week. I — I — wrote to you from her place that she was coming back." Elihu colored with a guilty conscience.

"I never got your letter. I only heard two hours ago that she was with you."

"She only stayed to settle up things there. I don't know as Humphrey ever told you that her grandfather left his property to her?"

"I don't know — Yes, yes, — he did."

"There were n't any of her folks left there, and her father had brought her up in such a way, late

years, that she was pretty much a stranger outside of her grandfather's house. When she got back there, she found that it was more like home to her here than anywhere else. Friend Hatch stayed a spell, to help her settle up the property, and then he had to go West again. As soon as she could she came to us."

"Elihu," said Ford, who had listened with but half a sense, "I have come here to speak to her. Shall I do it? I want you to advise me. I want you to tell me" —

"Nay, I must not meddle or make in this business," said the Shaker.

"You *did* meddle and make in it once," retorted Ford, unresentfully but inflexibly, "and I recognized your right to do so, from your point of view; I submitted to you. We can't withdraw from each other's confidence now. I have a claim upon your advice. Besides, in all worldly knowledge that comes through acquaintance with women, I am as much a Shaker as you are. I only know that I must speak with her. If she cares anything for me, as you said she did, I must speak. But when? Shall I go away again, and come back after a while? Since we last talked together have you learned anything that makes you think she would be willing to spend her life among you? If you have, I will leave her alone. She could be at peace here; and I, — I have only brought her trouble and sorrow so far. Even if she cared for me, I would leave her to you — No, I *would n't!* I could n't do that!

By all that a man can be to a woman, I ought n't to do it! But what do you say?"

Elihu had tilted his chair upon its hind-legs, and he rocked back and forth without bringing its fore-legs to the ground. "I have n't seen anything in her that would make me think she would like to stay with us. And I *have* heard that she intends to leave us as soon as she can find something to do in the world outside. Frances wants she should go to friends of hers in Boston that would help her find something. They 've been talking about it this afternoon, and Egeria's mind seems quite made up about going."

"Well," repeated Ford, "may I speak with her?"

"I can't answer you. I felt it a cross laid upon me to interfere against your showing your feeling for her here; but to interfere in behalf of it is a cross which I don't have any call to take up — twice."

"Can I stay here to-night?" asked Ford.

"Yee. They can give you a room at the office."

"Do you suppose Mrs. Williams could put me up some sort of bed in my old place? I would rather sleep there."

"Oh, yee, I guess so. I will step down with you and see."

"No, I 'll go alone. If she can't, I 'll come back to the office. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Elihu, with his flicker of a smile.

Ford's bed had not been taken down, and while the farmer's wife made it ready for him with fresh sheets, he kindled a roaring fire on his hearth. He sat a long time before it, turning over and over in his mind the same doubt which had tormented him when he last sat there. But he could not believe that Frances and Elihu would have let him come back if there had been any grounds for this fear. It had burnt in his heart to ask Elihu, and solve it; but that seemed a sort of cowardice, and he had withheld the question. He would not know the truth now till he had put his own fate to the test, and spoken in defiance of whatever the answer might be.

The next morning he perceived an undercurrent of deeply subdued excitement in such of the family as he met at the office, and a sympathy which he afterwards remembered with compassion. The brothers and sisters all shook hands with him, and, refraining from recognition of the suddenness of his return, said they were glad to see him back. "And that 's more than we can say to *some* of the friends from the world outside!" exclaimed Diantha, when her turn came. Ford was touched by this friendliness; a man so little used to being liked might overvalue it; but he looked impatiently about for Frances, and the sisters knew how to interpret his glance.

"She 's gone over to put the infirmary to rights a little," Rebecca explained. She added casually,

"Egery 's over there with her, I guess. She wanted to go."

The sisters decently turned from the door, but they stood a little way back from the window, and looked at him there as he crossed the street.

The door of the little house stood open, and Ford saw Frances within, dusting where there was no dust, and vainly rubbing the neat chairs with a cloth. The bed where Boynton had lain was dismantled: it seemed as if he might have risen to have it made for him. Ford expected to hear his voice, and a lump hung in his throat. When his sad eyes met those of Frances, he saw that hers were red with weeping. She gave her hand and said, "Good-morning, Friend Edward. I 'm *real* glad to see you back again. We 've all missed you. I was just thinkin' how you and Friend Boynton seemed to have been with us always. He went to a better place; but where did you go? Do you think the world outside is better? I wish you could feel to stay with us, Edward!"

"It is n't possible," said Ford, smiling sadly. "The only point on which I should agree with you is that the world outside is not so good a place."

"Well, that 's a great deal."

"It is n't enough."

"Really," said Frances, "it 's discouragin' to hear you and Egery go on. You say everything that 's good of the Shakers, but you won't be gathered in."

"I *think* everything that 's good of you. I honor

and reverence you ; I do everything but envy you. It 's another world that calls me."

" Yee," sighed the Shakeress, " that 's just the way with Egery. I suppose I have been here so long that I don't see anything strange in Shakers. The other people are the ones that are strange to me. But I can see 't it 's different with Egery. She 's had so much queerness in her life already 't I guess she don't want to have *much* more. Was you surprised to hear 't she 'd got back ? "

" I was very glad ; and I 'm very grateful to you, Frances " —

" I *s'posed* the handkerchief must be yours," Frances interrupted, with artful evasion. She went on to give some particulars of Boynton's funeral and of their sojourn in Egeria's old home and of her affairs. " It was *real* kind and good of Friend Hatch to stay as long as he did, and help her, especially as they *do* say he 's engaged to be married out West, there." Something like a luminous concussion seemed to take place in Ford's brain. The burden suddenly thrown from his soul left him light and giddy, and he clung for support to the door-post, while Frances prattled on : " Well, Humphrey says he 's a master-hand for business, and he 's sure to get along. He 's been a good friend to Egery, all through, and her father before her. I guess if Friend Boynton had taken *his* advice, there would n't been so much sufferin' for her. Well, she 's back with us again. But it 's only till she can find something for herself in the world outside.

I suppose it 's natural for her to want to be like folks. That 's the way I look at it."

Ford's heart throbbed. "Do you think I 'm like folks, Frances ? "

"Not much," replied Frances.

"Do you think I could be, — for her sake ? "

A flash of joy, succeeded by a red blush, went over the pale face of the Shakeress. "You 'd ought n't to talk to me of such things, Edward. You know it ain't right."

"I know — I know," pleaded the young man. "I know it 's all wrong. But — but I knew you knew about it, and I thought — I thought " —

"She 's up in the orchard, by her apple-tree ! " cried Frances, with hysterical abruptness. "Don't you say another word to me ! " But after Ford left the room, she ran to the door, and watched him going up the orchard aisle.

Egeria stood leaning against the tree, and looking another way, and she might well have been ignorant of his approach through the fallen grass, till she heard his husky voice : —

"I — I have come back — I would have come before, but I did n't know you were here " — He had some intention of excusing himself, because in his cogitations it had occurred to him that she must have wondered why he had not come. But she only turned on him that face of intense resistance, changing to question, and then to wild appeal. "For Heaven's sake," he exclaimed, "don't look at me in that way ! What is the matter ? "

"Oh, *why* did you come back?" she cried. "Why could n't you have stayed away, and left me in peace?"

He stood motionless, while his hopes seemed to fall in a tangible ruin round him. He saw now how eagerly he had built them on the fears of those fantastic communists, and how fondly he had hidden from himself all the reasons against them. He could have laughed at the ghastly wreck, but that he was too sick at heart. He moved his feet heavily, as if the long grass were fetters about them, and he tried to go; but without some other word he could not. "Well," he said, at last, "if you ask me, I can't tell you. I can go away again, and not molest you any more. Only, before I go, tell me — you 've not told me yet — that you forgive me, Egeria." Her whispered name had been so often on his lips that he now spoke it aloud for the first time without knowing it. "Since your father is gone, I must be more hateful to you than ever. But I am going out of your way now; try to forgive me and to tell me so! Let me have your pardon to take with me." She broke into a low sound of weeping, while he waited for her response. "Well, I will go. It 's best for me to know finally that, although you have tolerated me here, at the bottom of your heart you have always abhorred me."

"No, no! I did n't say that."

"Not in words, — no."

"But if you made me say that I forgave you" —

"Make you say it? Nothing under heaven could make you say it! What is it you mean?"

She looked up, and ran her eye in piteous search over his face.

"When you first came there, in Boston, and when you hurt me; when we went after the leaves, and I forgot him; when I talked with you in the garden, and blamed him; when I went with you into the woods, and neglected him, almost the last day he lived — Oh, even if I could n't, I ought to hate you! Did you expect — Yes, I *will*, — I will never let you go, now, till you tell me whether it was true. He is gone, and I have no one to help me. I shall have to do for myself; but whatever my life is to be, I am going to have it my own; and it is n't mine if that is true."

"If that is true?" repeated Ford, in stupefaction. "If what is true?"

But the impulse which had carried her to this point failed her, apparently, and left her terrified at her own daring. She cowered at the involuntary step he made toward her, as a bird stoops for flight. "If what is true?" he reiterated. "Tell me what you mean!"

He wondered if perhaps some rumor of his talk with Elihu had come to her, and she had wished to punish his presumption in trusting the Shaker's conjecture regarding her; if she were resolved to wreak upon him her maidenly indignation at the community's meddling. It seemed out of keeping with her and all the circumstances; but he could

think of nothing else, and he darkly approached it: "If you have heard anything here that makes you think that I have come to you in anything but the humblest, the most reverent, spirit, I beseech you not to believe it! Has Elihu — or Frances — Is it something they have said?"

"No," she said, and still shrunk away, as if he might be able to force the truth from her.

"Then, what is it? Surely you won't leave me in this perplexity? If there is anything that I can do or undo" —

"No! Oh, go, for pity's sake!"

"I can't go now," said the young man. "I won't go till you have told me what you mean. You must tell me."

She cast a strange glance at him. "If you make me tell you, that would show that it was true; and he was right when he used to say — I don't want to believe it! Go, and let me try to think that you came here by chance, and that you stayed for his sake. Indeed, indeed, I can get to thinking again that you never tried to influence me in that way!"

"In what way?" he asked, but now a gleam of light, lurid enough, began to steal upon his confusion. Her alternate eagerness and reluctance to be with him; her broken questions, the gestures, the looks, the tones, that had crossed with mystery the happiness he had known with her in the last weeks before her father's death, and made it at its sweetest fearful and insecure, recurred to him with new meaning, and a profound compassion qualified

his despair, and made him gentle and patient. "Is it possible," he asked, "that you mean that old delusion of your father's about me? And could you believe that I would try to control you against your will — to use some unnatural power over you? Ah!" he cried, "I could n't take even your forgiveness, now; for you might think that I had extorted it!" He looked sadly at her, but she did not speak, and he had a struggle to keep his pity of her from turning to execration of the unhappy man whose error could thus rise from his grave to cloud her soul; but he ruled himself, — not without an ominous remembrance of his former attempts to separate her cause from her father's, — and brokenly continued: "Well, I have deserved that, too. But I know that before he died your father came to a clearer mind about those things, and I believe that now, wherever he is, nothing could grieve him more than to know that he had left you in that hideous superstition." He looked with grave tenderness at her hidden face. "How could you think" — and now his tone expressed his wounded self-respect as well as his sorrow for her — "that I could be so false to both of us?"

"I did n't always think," she whispered. "I — I was afraid" —

"But what made you afraid that such a thing could be? I am a brute, — I know that; I gave you early proof of that, — but I hoped there was nothing covert in me."

"You said once that people influenced others

without knowing it; and once — that night when we came from the woods — you said it was a spell that made me lose the way, and would n't let me blame you " —

" And you really had those black doubts of me in your heart? I thought you were suffering me here because you were good and merciful, and you were always watching me to find out whether I was not using some vile magic against you."

" No, no! Not always," she protested, lifting her face. " Did I say that? "

" No, you did n't say it! Well, you had the right to hurt me in any way you could; and I give you the satisfaction of knowing that nothing could hurt me worse than this."

" Oh, I did n't mean to wound you! Don't think that! And I forgave you; yes, I did forgive you! I *never* hated you — not even that morning there by the fountain when I thought you had hurt him. And when you said I ought, it made me wonder if what he used to say — And then I could n't get it out of my mind! But I never meant to tell you by a single word or look, if it killed me."

" I believe you. It was something not to be spoken. I think now I can go without your pardon. It seems to me that we are quits."

Once more he turned to go, but she implored, all her face red with generous remorse, " Oh, not till you 've forgiven *me!* I never thought how it would seem to you. Indeed I never did! "

He smiled sadly. " Forgive *you?* Oh, that 's

easy. But even if it were very hard, I could do it. I can see how it has been with you from the first, and how, with what you had been taught to think of me by your father, — I don't blame him for it; he was as helpless as you were, — you perverted my careless words and gave them a sinister meaning that I never dreamt of. But what can I do, or say, to leave you with better thoughts of me?"

"I could see that you were kind and good even when I was the most afraid," she murmured. "But after the way we had begun together, and all that you had done to us, — and said to him, — sometimes I could n't understand why you were here, or why you stayed, and then" —

"I don't wonder! I had n't given you cause to expect any good of me; and if I were to tell you why I stayed, as I once hoped I might, I could n't make it appear an unselfish reason. Oh, my dearest!" he cried, "I loved you so that I could n't have taken your love itself against your will! Ever since I first saw you, and all the time that I had lost you, my whole life was for you; and when I found you again how could I help staying till you drove me from you? Good-by, and if any thought of yours has injured me, let me set it against my telling you this now." She had slowly averted her face; she did not shrink from him, but she did not return his good-by, and he waited in vain for her to speak. Then, "Shall I go?" he asked in foolish anti-climax.

"No" —

The blood rioted in his heart. "And do you still believe that of me?"

"I believe — what you say," she whispered.

"But why do you believe me? Do I make you do it?"

"I don't know — yes, something makes me."

"Against your will?"

"I can't tell."

"Do you think it is a spell, now?"

"I don't know."

"And are you afraid of it?"

"No" —

"What is it, Egeria?" he cried, and in the beseeching look which she lifted to his, their eyes tenderly met. "Oh, my darling! Was *this* the spell" —

The rapture choked him; he caught her hand and drew her towards him.

But at this bold action, Sister Frances, who had not ceased to watch them, threw her apron over her head.

XXVIII.

THE powers of the family were heavily taxed by the consideration of a case without precedent in its annals. On the report of Sister Frances and the subsequent knowledge of Elihu, it became necessary to act at once. Probably no affair of such delicate importance had ever presented itself to a society vowed to celibacy as the fact of a courtship and proposal of marriage which had taken place with their privity, and with circumstances so peculiar that they could not wholly feel that they had withheld their approval.

"What I look at, Elihu," said Frances, "is this: that we can't any of us say but what it 's the best thing that can happen to Egery, so long as she ain't going to be gathered in. And what I want to know is whether we 've got to turn our backs on her because she 's doin' the best she can, or whether we 're goin' to show out that we feel to rejoice with her."

"Nay, we can't do that," replied Elihu, in sore embarrassment. "There are no two ways about it but what our natural feelings do go with her, — to some extent. I 'm free to confess that when Friend Ford came and told me just now I felt " — Elihu

apparently found himself not so free to confess after all. He stopped abruptly, and added, "But that 's neither here nor there. What we 've got to do now is not to withhold our sympathy from these young people who are doing right in their order, and at the same time not to relax our opposition to the principle."

"Love the sinner and condemn the sin," suggested Laban.

"Nay," replied Elihu, rejecting the phraseology rather than the idea, "not exactly that."

"I can't understand," interposed Rebecca, with her sex's abhorrence of an abstraction, "where and how they 're goin' to get married. There ain't any Shaker way of marryin', and I don't know what we *should* do with our young folks, if they got married here. I don't suppose we should have one of 'em left by spring."

"Nay," said Elihu, "we might as well give up at once." He rocked himself vigorously to and fro; but his hardening face did not lose its anxious expression.

"Where *will* they get married?" asked Rebecca. "She has n't got anywheres to go. Her own folks are all dead, at home, and she has n't *got* any home."

"I don't know. They can't get married here," returned Elihu.

"They can't go right off to a minister and get married now, so soon after her father's death. And besides, she ain't ready. She has n't got anything made up."

The question of clothes agitated even these unworldly women, and they debated and deplored Egeria's unprepared condition, urging that she must have this, and could not do without that, till Elihu could bear it no longer. "I feel," he cried, "that it is unseemly for us to consider these things! It identifies us practically with a state which we only tolerate as part of the earthly order. We must not have anything to do with it from this time forth."

"Well, Elihu, what shall we do?" demanded Diantha. "We might send *him* away, but we can't turn *her* out-of-doors. Do you want he should go on courtin' her here?" Elihu opened his lips to speak, but only emitted a groan. "We have got to bear our part. I guess the rule against marriage ain't any stronger than the rule of love and charity, — so long as we don't any of us marry, *ourselves*."

"Well, well!" cried Elihu, "settle it amongst you. Only remember, they can't marry here." He took his hat, and went into Humphrey's room, where the latter had remained, discreetly absorbed in his accounts; and Laban, finding himself alone with the sisters, hastened to follow Elihu. Their withdrawal was inspiration to Frances: —

"I guess I can go down to Boston with Egery, and fix it with my sister so 't she can stay and be married from her house whenever she gets ready." When the sensation following her solution of the problem allowed her to speak she added, "The question is how much it 'll be right for us to do for her. She has n't got a thing."

The sisters justly understood this to mean their degree of complicity in decking Egeria for the unholy rite, and they entered into the question with the seriousness it merited. They began by agreeing with Elihu that the only way was to have nothing to do with the matter; and having appeased their consciences, they each made such concessions and sacrifices to the exigency as they must. Before spring, when the wedding took place, the sisters had found it consistent with an enlarged sense of duty to present the bride with a great number of little gifts, of an exemplary usefulness, for the most part, but not wholly inexpressive of a desire, if not a sense, of beauty. Their conceptions of the world's fashions were too vague to allow of their contributing to the trousseau, and such small attempts as they made in that direction were overruled by Frances's sister, a decisive and notable lady, who, however, ordained that certain of the decorative objects, as hooked rugs and embroidered tidies, were as worthy a place in Mrs. Ford's simple house as most of the old-fashioned things that people like nowadays. With Frances, the question whether she should or should not be present at the wedding remained a cross which she bore all winter, and which grew sorer as the day approached. When it actually came, she meekly bowed her spirit and remained away. But she found compensation in the visit which she paid her sister directly afterwards, and which she spent chiefly in helping Egeria set in order the cottage Ford had taken in one of

the suburbs. He had worked hard at his writing all winter, and they had no misgivings in beginning life on his earnings, and on the small sum Egeria had inherited from her grandfather.

It is now several years since their marriage, and they have never regretted their courage. They had their day of carefulness and of small things — that happy day, which all who have known it remember so fondly — but this is already past. One of those ignoble discoveries which chemists sometimes make in their more ambitious experiments has turned itself to profit, almost without his agency, and chiefly at the suggestion of his wife, whose more practical sense perceived its general acceptability; and the sale of an ingenious combination known to all housekeepers now makes life easy to the Fords. He has given up his newspaper work, and has built himself a laboratory at the end of his garden, where the income from his invention enables him to pursue the higher chemistry, without as yet any distinct advantage to the world, but to his own content. It is observed by those who formerly knew him that marriage has greatly softened him, and Phillips professes that, robbed of his former roughness, he is no longer so fascinating. Their acquaintance can scarcely be said to have been renewed since their parting in Vardley. Ford was able to see Phillips's innocence in what occurred; but they could never have been easy in each other's presence after that scene, though they have met on civil terms. Phillips accounts in his own way for

not seeing his former friend any more. "As brica-brac," he explains, when ladies inquire after their extinct acquaintance, "Ford was perpetually attractive; but as part of the world's ordinary furniture he can't interest me. When he married the Pythoness, I was afraid there was too much brica-brac; but really, so far as I can hear, they have neutralized each other into the vulgarest commonplace. Do you use the Ford Fire Kindler? He does n't put his name to it, and that is n't exactly the discovery that is making his fortune. He has come to that, — making money. And imagine a Pythoness with a prayer-book, who goes to the Episcopal church, and hopes to get her husband to go, too! No, I don't find my Bohemia in their suburb." From time to time Phillips proposes to seek that realm in what he calls his native Europe; but he does not go. Perhaps because Mrs. Perham is there, widowed by Mr. Perham's third stroke of paralysis, and emancipated to the career of travel and culture, which she has illustrated in the capitals of several Latin countries. To do her justice, she never turned the water-proof affair to malicious account, nor failed to speak well of Ford, for whom she always claimed to feel an unrequited respect.

As to Hatch, one of the first of those deep and full confidences between Ford and Egeria which follow engagement related to the man in whom Ford had feared a rival. Egeria knew merely that Hatch had repaid with constant services some favors that her father had been able to do him in

their old home, and that he had continued faithful to Boynton when all others had dropped away from him.

"I wish I had understood how it was when he came to me there in Boston," said Ford. He added simply, "I treated him very badly, because I thought he was in love with you."

"Was that any reason why you should treat him badly?" asked Egeria.

Ford reflected. "Yes, I suppose it was. I was in love with you, too. But he 's had his turn. He 's left me with the feeling that perhaps" —

"Perhaps what?"

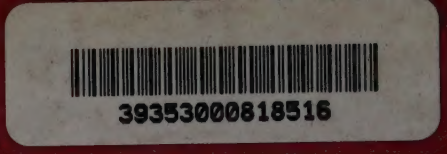
"Perhaps — nothing!"

Egeria divined what he did not say. "He has n't left *me* with that feeling," she said reproachfully.

Since that time Hatch is no longer on the road, as he would phrase it, but has gone into business for himself at Denver, where he married last year, with duly interviewed pomp and circumstance, the daughter of one of the early settlers, a hoary patriarch of forty-three, who went to Denver as remotely as 1870. He called upon the Fords when he came East on his wedding journey, and he and Ford found themselves friends. The Western lady thought Egeria a little stiff, but *real* kind-hearted, and one of the most stylish-appearing persons she ever saw. In fact, Egeria shows a decided fondness for dress, and after the long hunger of her solitary girlhood she enters, with a zest which Ford cannot always share, into all the innocent pleasures of life.

She likes parties and dinners and theatres; since their return from Europe she has given several picnic breakfasts, where her morning costume has been the marvel of her guests. The tradition of her life before marriage is locally very dim; it is supposed that she left the stage to marry. This is not altogether reconcilable with the appearance of quaint people in broad-brims, or in gauze caps and tight-sleeved straight drab gowns, with whom she is sometimes seen in her suburb; but as the Fords are known to go every summer to pass a month in an old house belonging to the Vardley Shakers, their visitors are easily accounted for.

The grass has already grown long over Boynton's grave. They who keep his memory think compassionately of his illusions, if they were wholly illusions, but they shrink with one impulse from the dusky twilight through which he hoped to surprise immortality, and Ford feels it a sacred charge to keep Egeria's life in the full sunshine of our common day. If Boynton has found the undiscovered country, he has sent no message back to them, and they do not question his silence. They wait, and we must all wait.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